The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

ALL NEW ISSUE

MAY 1962 35¢

Hugh Pentecost
A World of Envelopes

Michael Gilbert
Pick Up the King

Rufus King
Gift for the Bride

Phyllis Bentley
Message in a Bottle

Anthony Boucher
Best Mysteries of the Month

Don Knowlton
The Letter of the Law

Pierre Audemars
Born for Trouble

A DAVIS PUBLICATION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

10 editions: U.S.A., Australian, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese

ALL NEW ISSUE

DETECTIVE STORIES

A World of Envelopes	*Hugh Pentecost*	5
Pick Up the King	*Michael Gilbert*	17
Fountain of Youth	*William W. Stuart*	43
Message in a Bottle	*Phyllis Bentley*	66

DETECTIVE NOVELETTE

Gift for the Bride	*Rufus King*	110

CRIME STORIES

The Letter of the Law	*Don Knowlton*	28
The Devil Inside	*R. F. Darrington*	54
The Shy Man and the Lemon Tarts	*Michael Zuroy*	85
Born for Trouble	*Pierre Audemars*	92

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

Ace in the Hole	*Alfred Martinez*	100
MYSTERY HARDCOVERS OF THE MONTH		130
MYSTERY PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH		64
BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH	*Anthony Boucher*	65

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 39, No. 5, Whole No. 222, MAY, 1962. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc. at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $5.00 in the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 505 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1962 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

Joel Davis, *Assistant Publisher* Paul W. Fairman, *Managing Editor*
Melvin Flamm, *Business Manager* Constance Di Rienzo, *Executive Editorial Secretary*
Frank Taggart, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Don't miss the new book about the 87th Precinct

THE EMPTY HOURS

3 novelettes: dramatic and suspenseful stories about the detectives of the 87th and their constant, round-the-clock battle against crime.

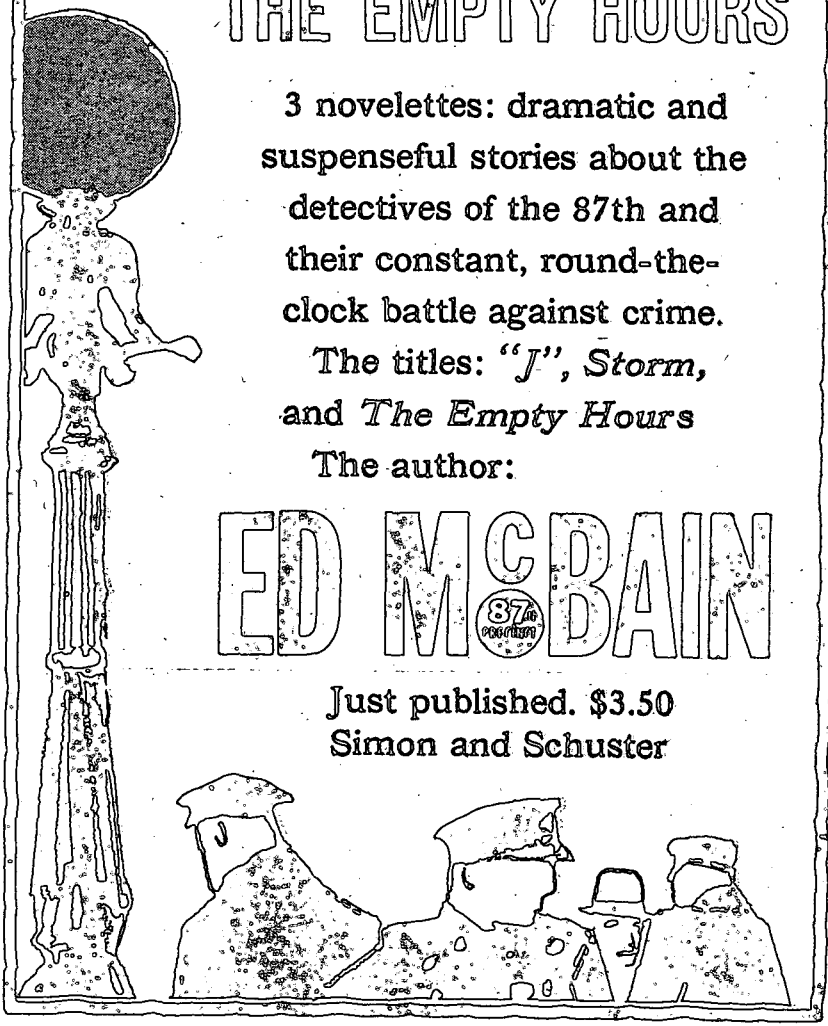
The titles: *"J"*, *Storm*, and *The Empty Hours*

The author:

ED McBAIN

87th Precinct

Just published. $3.50
Simon and Schuster



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Special Offer to EQMM readers

"The Walker list, diverse and rich, is as dependably exciting as any in the States.... We are deeply indebted for the discovery or re-discovery of Simon Harvester, Robin Daniel, Sarah Gainham, Michael Underwood, Roy Vickers, Stewart Farrar and others."

—JAMES SANDOE,
N. Y. Herald Tribune

Send for list of Walker mysteries, specially priced, to:

WALKER & COMPANY
75 East 55 Street, N. Y. 22

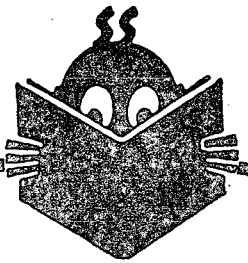
"If you want to see your wife alive again you have five days to raise twenty-five thousand dollars..." Alone and afraid, he faced

The Five Day Nightmare

From the dean of America's mystery writers

FREDRIC BROWN, author of **THE MURDERERS**

$2.95 DUTTON



The party was over. And the last to leave was a corpse.

THOMAS B. DEWEY'S great Chicago detective, Mac, takes on a case that begins with death at a party and goes on to involve:

1. an old flame (Mac's)
2. a murder weapon (Mac's)
3. a prime suspect: Mac

HOW HARD TO KILL

Just out. $3.50. An Inner Sanctum Mystery published by SIMON AND SCHUSTER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a new story by

HUGH PENTECOST

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HUGH PENTECOST

TITLE: *A World of Envelopes*

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Are the rules different for the judge and the judged? Old Mike Hogan, with sixty years of New York's waterfront behind him, wondered why . . . and knew what to do.*

THE TWO MEN WHO FACED EACH other across the shiny, flat-topped desk had been close friends for sixty years. The man who stood behind the desk was a knotty, vigorous, and vital seventy, with blazing black eyes that glared out from under bushy black brows. His thick, dark hair had only a scattered salt-shaking of white. His voice was deep and strong, with the thunder of power in it.

The man who faced him without quavering was thin, bent from carrying heavy loads for too long on once broad shoulders. His hair was a thin, wispy white. His eyes were a pale blue but they met the lightning across from him with an icy firmness the thunder couldn't shake.

"You've been wrong in your life before this, John," old Mike Hogan said in a quiet, controlled voice. "You've had the guts before to admit it. You're wrong now—dead-wrong. You'd better admit it before you destroy someone I think you really love."

John Maclyn brought a fist down on his desk. "I'm not wrong," he shouted. "I wish to God I were!"

From the windows behind John Maclyn you could see a panorama of the Port of New York—the Statue of Liberty, Governor's Island, the Brooklyn docks, and on a clear day, The Narrows. John Maclyn owned or leased more than a dozen piers in this harbor, and his fleet of passenger liners, freighters, tugs, and lighters crisscrossed the North River night and day.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outside the closed door of Maclyn's office a tense staff waited for the outcome of the encounter between the king of a great shipping empire and the thin old man who was a sort of "statesman without portfolio" at two hundred a week. No one in Maclyn's power-packed world would dare face him in a rage except old Mike Hogan. Mike had faced the boss over private matters in the past, matters that had meant somebody's head, and Mike had won out more often than not.

But this time, the staff knew, old Mike's cause was hopeless. John Maclyn had made his stand in public. The story was in newspapers all over the country. Maclyn would never back down from a position he had taken in public, particularly when it involved what he considered a matter of right and wrong.

"Let's look at the facts," old Mike Hogan said quietly. "One man accepts a bribe. He throws a fight. He takes a powder so that no one can lay hands on him. You throw the book at him. That's as it should be. Now, the other man refuses a bribe. He fights an honest fight. But he breaks a small rule because he doesn't want to go home to find his wife's face cut up with a razor. You throw the book at him. Technically right. He broke a rule —you are severe, but technically right. But then you personally blacklist him so that he can't make a living at the only other trade he knows! That's *not* fair, John. That's *not* right."

Again Maclyn's fist hit the desk. "Can I be known publicly to be sheltering a cheat?" he demanded. "What's our world coming to, Mike? Quiz show frauds, payola, college boys buying their theses. We've got to stop mollycoddling the cheaters or the whole moral fiber of our country will go down the drain."

"Right and wrong sometimes depends on where you sit," old Mike persisted, his pale blue eyes unwavering.

"No!" Maclyn shouted. "There are no shades of right and wrong, and I'm sorry to hear you say there are, Mike."

"Would you judge a man who commits a crime for money the same as you'd judge a man who fails to report a crime because his loved ones might be beaten up or crippled?"

"Hiding a crime is the same as taking part in it!" Maclyn said.

Old Mike's mouth moved in a faint, hard smile. "You remember the old days when you and I used to go to Ben Gibbs' speakeasy for a drink after work? That was against the law, John."

"An unenforceable law, a wrong law!" Maclyn said.

"I'd say the drinkers and the nondrinkers had different slants on it," old Mike countered.

"There's no use your talking any more about this, Mike," Maclyn

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said. "I'm sorry for Hooks. I'm sorry for his wife. I wish I didn't have to sit in judgment on him. He's been as close to me as he has to you."

"Not quite," old Mike said, sharpness creeping into his voice.

"The case is closed," Maclyn said, and turned toward the windows overlooking the river.

"Not quite," old Mike said again. He turned and walked softly out of the office.

The friendship between John Maclyn and Mike Hogan had begun at the turn of the century when their parents had shared a two-family house on the West Side near the piers. Their fathers were longshoremen in the dog-eat-dog world of violence that was the waterfront. John and Mike were each ten years old when they went to work as water boys on the piers.

Mike Hogan was a steady, hard-working, keep-your-mouth-shut kind of boy. John Maclyn, even in the very beginning, was an aggressive opportunist. When they grew old enough to take over a cargo hook and start juggling crates and bales, John began looking for something better. He found himself a job as a deck hand on a harbor tug, one of a fleet operated by an old sea captain. While Mike's back began to bend under the ceaseless business of hefting cargo, John ingratiated himself with the old sea captain, who was a childless man without family; and when John was twenty, the old sea captain died and left nine tugboats, a sizeable amount of cash, and a profitable business to John Maclyn.

Mike was soon off the piers himself, working for John. John was not a man with his eyes on the present. He mortgaged his assets to buy some lighters, and when they were making him a profit he picked up two freighters from a bankrupt shipping company. And so it went —the Maclyn empire growing and growing, and Mike acting as a sort of jack-of-all-trades for his friend.

There was only one serious conflict between the two men, and it was over a red-haired Irish nymph named Laura Parnell. John could offer her a thousand times the worldly goods and security, but Mike offered her a love that seemed far more desirable to her. They were married and lived an ecstatic year together. And then Laura died giving birth to Mike's son, Jerry.

John Maclyn held no grudge against Mike. He stood by his heartbroken friend with an infant son who, for a time, was hated by his father. Laura had been Mike's whole world. But with the passage of time the boy grew, and his father grew to love him, and his Godfather, the great John Maclyn, helped a bit here and there with his schooling and the like. Jerry was to have a better start than either Mike or John had had. There would be a place for an educated boy in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maclyn empire. Ships came and went, and wars came and went. Jerry was twenty-nine years old, had married and produced a grandson for old Mike—Michael Hogan the second—when the second World War broke out. Jerry was on a Maclyn freighter headed for England to do business there for old John when a German submarine sank the freighter. Jerry perished in the icy waters of the North Sea.

Michael Hogan the second was four years old when his father died. The wheel had come full turn, and once again old Mike, still working at a modest salary, and Old John, king of an empire, found themselves involved in raising another Hogan. Maclyn had theories about the boy's future. He should start at the bottom, learn every aspect of the shipping business.

So young Mike began as an office boy in the summertime. As his magnificent young physique developed he went on the piers as a longshoreman. At the age of twenty he jolted the two old men by turning up married, without having announced his intentions in advance. But the girl, Mary, seemed to be a very solid citizen and the two old men were not unhappy about her.

"Early responsibility may turn out to be a good thing," Maclyn said. "After all, he has a future."

Old Mike had married Laura when he was twenty-two, and John would have done the same thing if he'd had the chance.

After an eight-hour day of wrestling cargo, young Mike, instead of crawling home to rest a weary body like most of the men, used to go to the Y gym to do a little boxing and swimming. He was a fine, clean-cut blond with clear eyes as blue as Old Mike's. Somebody spotted young Mike at the gym, saw that he had a real potential as a fighter, and offered him a preliminary bout in one of the neighborhood fight clubs. Young Mike went to his grandfather about it. There might be some quick money in the fight game. He and Mary dreamed of having a family that he couldn't afford on his longshoreman's pay.

The two Mikes went to John Maclyn about it, because Maclyn was in a special position to advise. Recently he had been accorded a signal honor by the Governor, who had appointed the shipping magnate to the State Athletic Commission which controlled all boxing in the State.

Maclyn gave his hearty approval—he had an eye on good publicity for the Maclyn enterprises. Young Mike was one of "his boys."

Young Mike's career in the ring was meteoric. He cleaned up in the small clubs. He acquired the ring nickname of Hooks, because of the cargo hook that was the symbol of his trade. Hooks Hogan was an overnight sensation. He acquired a manager, recommended and approved by Maclyn.

Then came the day when he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

offered the semi-final spot at the Garden against Tommy Tyler, the Number Three man in the light-heavyweight ranks. Hooks was on his way to big money.

Old Mike became aware that something was worrying Hooks about the Garden fight. Mike thought it was probably a natural nervousness at breaking into the big time so quickly. He talked to Mary about it, but she was far too worried about Hooks's physical safety to have noticed anything odd in her husband's behavior.

The fight was a disaster.

Hooks came out of his corner, feeling his way. He landed a tentative left jab on Tyler's nose, and then cut loose with his right. Tyler went down. Even in the back row in the top balcony it seemed obvious that all Tyler had felt was the wind from that right, which had missed cleanly. But Tyler went down and stayed down for the count.

For just a moment old Mike, in a ringside seat, was on his feet screaming his delight. Then he heard the thunder of boos. The customers staged a near riot. If ever a big-time fight looked brutally fixed this Tyler-Hogan go was it.

The Commission promptly seized the fighters' purses and ordered a hearing. Mike wasn't too worried about that because it wasn't Hooks who had taken the dive.

Tyler never showed up for the hearing. It was a clear admission of guilt. Hooks, pale and tense, did some talking that was to be his finish. He told the Commission that he'd been approached by underworld characters to throw the fight. He'd refused. He'd refused flatly.

Who were the men who had approached him?

Hooks became vague and uncertain.

Why hadn't Hooks reported this to the Commission?

He'd refused to throw the fight. What was there to report?

John Maclyn, his black eyes blazing under his bushy eyebrows, asked the next question.

"You have studied the Commission rules, Hooks?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that you are required to report any approach of this sort by gamblers? Whether you went along with the fixers or not?"

"I have read the rules, sir," Hooks said, pale as a ghost.

"Then why didn't you report to us?"

"I was afraid, sir," Hooks said.

"Afraid of the Commission?" Maclyn thundered.

"No, sir."

Old Mike knew what Hooks had been afraid of even before Hooks explained. Huddled around the kitchen table in Hooks's and Mary's apartment, the boy made it clear enough—and old Mike understood. He'd lived on the waterfront all his life.

The men who had approached

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hooks were some of Buzz Lombardi's boys. Buzz Lombardi was a tiger crouching in the shadows of the port, living off kickbacks, loansharking, the numbers racket, and maintaining his power through the ruthless application of violence. Killing and crippling were a matter of simple routine to Buzz Lombardi, accomplished as matter-of-factly as a bus driver collects his fares.

"There was not just me," Hooks said. "There was Mary to think of —and you, Gramps. When I refused to throw the fight they said okay but keep my mouth shut—or else. That's why I couldn't identify them at the hearing. I played it as straight as I could, Gramps. But there were Mary and you to think of."

The Commission lifted Hooks's license to fight—for life.

John Maclyn sent down word from his big private office overlooking the harbor that Hooks was blacklisted from working in any of the Maclyn enterprises. And blacklisted by Maclyn, no one else in the port would give Hooks the time of day.

The case, Maclyn had said, was closed.

Old Mike Hogan was not a man who thought in literary terms. He would not have been able to articulate what was going on in his mind as he left Maclyn's office. He would not have had the words to say that twice before in his life the person dearest to him had been struck down by an enemy whom he, Mike, could not fight. He couldn't fight the deformed womb that had cost Laura her life. He couldn't fight the U-boat that had struck at Jerry in the cold darkness of the North Sea.

But Hooks's enemy was something else again. Was it Lombardi, the racketeer with his bribes and his bets? Was it John Maclyn with his too rigid code of ethics? Or was it, he wondered, a public state of mind brought on by a college professor who was given the answers to a quiz in advance, a disc jockey who was given money to popularize certain records, a college boy who bought a thesis for his doctorate? The public that self-righteously condemned others while not mentioning their own small cheats on income tax returns, their sly short-changing of a customer, their secret excitement at a drink with a lady not your wife or a gent not your husband.

Mike knew he couldn't fight that part of the public which supported John Maclyn's stand—supported and applauded it. Are the rules different, Mike wondered, for the judge and the judged?

Hooks had broken a rule—a good rule—out of fear for Mary's and his father's physical safety. Within that framework punishment was just, if hard to take. But to be blacklisted to be deprived of earning a living was another matter. That Mike

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could fight with the only weapon he had—a sixty-year knowledge of the waterfront and its ways.

Miss Wilson, Maclyn's private secretary, found her way to the little cubbyhole that was Mike's office. The old man sat hunched at his desk looking out the single window, down the harbor toward The Narrows.

"No luck?" Miss Wilson asked sympathetically.

Old Mike turned to look at her, and Miss Wilson was startled. The defeated slant of the shoulders was not reflected in Mike's pale blue eyes. They were as cold and bright as two newly minted dimes.

"No luck," he said, and the old eyes dared her to express further sympathy.

Miss Wilson placed a folder on Mike's desk. Part of his many-sided job was the supervision of security on the Maclyn piers. He flipped open the folder. Lying on top of the other papers was a check for $425 from the insurance company. The old eyes questioned Miss Wilson.

"For the tweeds that were stolen off Pier X last week," she said.

The pale eyes narrowed. "Those were the tweeds the boss picked out for himself when he was in Scotland?"

Miss Wilson nodded.

A thin smile moved old Mike's lips. "Don't put this check through, Miss Wilson, until I've done a little snooping. I have a hunch Mr. Maclyn would rather have those tweeds back than the money. He was planning to have some new suits made from them."

Sven Bergstrom, the day watchman on Pier X, waved a greeting as old Mike walked onto the stringpiece later that morning. Shifty-eyed, old Mike thought. Bergstrom always gave a swift look past you as if he expected to see a boarding party of marines in your wake.

Frank McIntosh, the pier superintendent, was an old friend of Mike's. They always stopped to pass the time of day.

"About those tweeds that were stolen from the boss last week," Old Mike said.

"The insurance company's checked out on them," McIntosh said. "I understand they've okayed payment."

"Not good enough," old Mike said, looking down at the toes of his shoes. "The boss won't take the money. He wants the tweeds back and he wants the guy who took them punished."

McIntosh stared at old Mike as though he'd gone off his rocker. "That's a two-way street you can't travel, Mike," he said, "and you know it. Maybe you can get the tweeds back for a few bucks and no questions asked, but you can't ask questions *and* get the tweeds back."

"There are no shades of right

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and wrong," old Mike said, still staring down at his shoes. "A crime was committed and somebody's got to pay for it."

"I don't have to tell you, Mike," McIntosh said, as if he hadn't believed his ears. "Pilferage by longshoremen has been going on for a couple of hundred years. It's almost an established right—trade custom and practice. That's why you pay such high insurance premiums. What's got into you, Mike? The insurance company's satisfied."

"Just spread the word," Mike said. "I'm going to make an example of the guy who stole those tweeds."

Word spreads on the waterfront faster than by radio. The next morning Sven Bergstrom, the watchman, didn't report for work. When old Mike got the news he headed toward a rooming house on the west side, not far from the place where he and John Maclyn had grown up as kids.

Bergstrom was gone, according to the landlady. He'd moved out lock, stock, and barrel the night before. Old Mike asked to see the room. It was bare—no trace of the shifty-eyed Swede. Mike opened the door of the L-shaped closet and looked in. Empty.

He looked around the corner of the L. The tip of his tongue moistened his thin lips. Resting on the floor, overlooked or purposely left behind, was a brand-new portable typewriter. Mike brought it into the room and opened the case. It was an Olympia. Could have been part of an import from Germany and pilfered off the pier, Mike thought. But Bergstrom would have no use for a typewriter—except for its cash value.

Mike wrote down the serial number of the machine in his notebook and went back to his office. He called the insurance company to inquire if typewriters had been stolen from Pier X. The answer was no. Then he called a friend of his in a typewriter exchange on lower Broadway. Half an hour later he had the name of the owner of the typewriter. The small hairs rose on the back of Mike's neck when he got the word. The typewriter belonged to a tailor on Tenth Avenue named Murray Roth. A *tailor!*

There was no one in the front room of Roth's tailor shop when old Mike walked in late that afternoon, but he could hear the snip of shears in the cutting room at the back and someone whistling to himself in a soft off-key sound.

Mike pushed aside the curtain and went in. Murray Roth was a pleasant-looking middle-aged man with mild gray eyes. He was cutting a bolt of tweed to which a tissue-paper pattern was pinned.

"Sorry. I didn't hear you come in," Roth said. "I used to have a bell that rang when you opened the outside door, but it got on my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nerves. What can I do for you?"

Mike told him his name. "You lost a typewriter recently, Mr. Roth?"

"You from the insurance company?" Roth asked. "They said they'd send a man around—couple of days ago."

"You did lose a machine—an Olympia portable?"

Roth nodded. "Last Monday. I had it on the desk in the front room. I intended to use it to make out my monthly bills. Sometime, Monday, when I was back here—" He made an eloquent gesture with his long, thin hands.

"You know a Bergstrom?"

A nerve twitched high up on Roth's cheek. "Well—yes," he said. "He was in here once."

"Last Monday?"

"Well—yes."

"I found the typewriter in his room," Mike said. "That's how I got here, Mr. Roth. He must have walked off with it when you weren't looking. Just couldn't resist picking up something of value that was lying around loose."

"Well, what do you know!" Roth said.

Mike bent down and picked up a small piece of tweed from the floor. It was the salvage on which the Customs Stamp was still visible.

"Bergstrom bring you that tweed, Mr. Roth?"

The color began to seep slowly out of Roth's face. "There's something wrong with the goods?"

Mike nodded. "Stolen off one of the west side piers," he said. "The pier where Bergstrom worked. You making the suits for him?"

"No," Roth said, shaking his head vigorously.

"Who you making them for, Mr. Roth?"

Roth moistened his pale lips. "I don't want to get in any trouble."

"You're not in any trouble," Mike said. "Probably your customer isn't either. He may have thought he was buying from Bergstrom legitimately. He may also be able to tell us where Bergstrom is."

Roth's voice lowered to a whisper. "You'll understand why I hesitate when I tell you I'm making these suits for Mr. Buzz Lombardi."

Old Mike didn't want to frighten the tailor, so he thanked him politely and told him he'd get his typewriter back. But he stopped in at the precinct station house and had a word with Captain Silverman on the way home. He'd been hunting for a small fry, Bergstrom, and he'd come up with a big fish, Lombardi. Someone might have seen Mike in Roth's shop, and the tailor might be in danger from that visit. Silverman said he'd keep an eye on Murray Roth for a few days; he'd also have his boys look for the missing Bergstrom.

"It's a pleasure to have someone break the pattern for a change and go after one of these cheap crooks," Silverman said.

It was just turning dark when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

old Mike approached the small brownstone where he lived. There was a crowd gathered around the front steps, and a police patrol car and an ambulance were parked alongside.

Mike edged his way through the crowd. Half a dozen people said hello, including the cop who was standing by a crumpled figure on the steps being ministered to by the ambulance intern.

"Hurt bad?" Mike asked.

"A real thorough going-over," the intern said, without looking up. "He'll probably make it if internal injuries aren't too severe."

"Know him, Mike?" the cop asked.

Mike smiled—a small, bitter smile. It was typical of the waterfront that no one had yet identified the injured man. No one could describe the car that had driven up to the front steps, or the men who had thrown out the injured man. There are never any witnesses on the waterfront.

"Yeah, I know him," Mike said. "Name of Sven Bergstrom. He's the day watchman on Pier X."

The Thomas A. McNulty Social Club was a hangout for Buzz Lombardi and his boys. The main room, which contained two pool tables and a small bar, was crowded when Mike walked in about eight that night. Men looked up from their pool games through a haze of smoke as Mike headed for the back room. He got the feeling that his visit was not unexpected.

Buzz Lombardi was a dark, bald man with eyes like shoe buttons. He sat at a card table playing solitaire, his bald head shining in the overhead drop-light. Somewhere in the shadow someone else sat perched on the edge of a table.

"Hello, Mike," Lombardi said. "Long time no see."

"You were expecting me?" Mike asked.

"Sure," Lombardi said. "You sent out the word you wanted Bergstrom. I delivered him to you. I figured you'd be around to say thanks."

"You admit you beat him up?" Mike asked.

"What do you care, Mike? You got the guy who stole your tweeds. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Old Mike drew a deep breath. "I can't get you for assault, Buzz," he said. "It'll be the old story—not a witness on the whole waterfront. But I've got you cold, son, on receiving stolen goods."

"It figured," Buzz said undisturbed. "I tried to talk to Roth, the tailor, but your friend Silverman has got him covered like a tent. You—or is it John Maclyn—will bring the charge against me?"

"Right."

"You're a nervy old galoot, walking in here with that message," Buzz said without anger. "Well, I got news for you, Mike—that is to say, I got news for Maclyn."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes?"

"Mike, you're sixty years on the waterfront. You know what it is. It's a world of envelopes. The longshoreman kicks back to me so he can work—and do a little stealing unmolested. The contracting stevedore passes me an envelope filled with nice green lettuce so I won't interfere with his longshoreman labor—no slow-downs, no walkouts. The contracting stevedore soaks the shipper to cover the envelope that comes to me. But he already has passed an envelope with some more nice green lettuce in it to that same shipper in order to get the contract to move the cargo in the first place. Envelopes here and envelopes there, Mike. Now, you tell your Mr. Maclyn this: he gets any crazy idea about bringing a stolen goods charge against me and I put the squeeze on his stevedoring contractor. That squeeze'll be so tight the contractor will do anything I say. And what I'll say is that he's got to make a public statement that he paid off your Mr. Maclyn to get contracts on his piers. If it's worth it to Maclyn to have this made public just to bring a petty larceny charge against me, okay—just tell him to go ahead. That's the news I got for you, Mike."

John Maclyn stared at his old friend much as the pier superintendent had the day before—as if Old Mike had lost his mind.

"Of course I take a handout from the stevedoring company, Mike," he said. "You know that's the system—you've known it for sixty years! I take it because it assures a quick, efficient turnover of cargo. When a contractor has to pay you to get a job he has to do it quickly and efficiently or he loses money. Taking money from the stevedoring contractor is just like insurance."

"It's a bribe," Old Mike said, his pale eyes cold.

"It's custom and practice!" Maclyn shouted. "It's been going on in the shipping business for hundreds of years!"

"There are no shades of right and wrong," Old Mike said. "It's a bribe. Now, I've produced the thief for you and the man who received your stolen tweeds. Are you going to lay off them because if you don't you'll be revealed as a bribe taker?"

Maclyn writhed in his chair. "It's not a bribe, Mike! It's just a way of doing business."

"It all depends on where you sit."

"Of course."

"I said that to you about Hooks and you said you were sorry I felt that way. Hooks didn't take a bribe. He broke a rule because he was afraid for his wife's safety, and mine. He wouldn't talk. You're worse than that, John. You've taken bribes and you won't talk. You're prepared to let two criminals go free to save your own hide. You haven't even got the excuse of a wife or father to protect."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You've known about this setup with the stevedoring companies for years and years," Maclyn said. "It's never made you squeamish before."

"Two days ago in this office you told me how to interpret the rules, John. You said there are no shades of right and wrong. So I knew you wouldn't want any criminals to go free. I set out to do my job the right way for once. I guess Hooks won't mind so much taking his punishment if he knows the rules for the judge are the same as the rules for the judged. You were talking about the moral fiber of our country going down the drain, John. If you ask me, the danger of that lies in the fact that the same rules don't apply to everyone. Custom and practice always seem to justify the cheater in his own world. And, like you said, John, we've got to stop mollycoddling the cheaters."

Maclyn raised his dark eyes and there was pain in them. "You set out to do this to me, Mike—you set out to do it on purpose. After sixty years of friendship—"

"I set out," Old Mike interrupted, "to move you over so you could see things with both eyes open."

Maclyn stared at him, "I've been playing God, haven't I?" he said in an odd voice.

Maclyn sat silent for a long time, chin sunk forward on his chest, eyes hidden by the heavy dark brows. Finally he reached for the telephone.

"Miss Wilson, will you call the District Attorney's office and make an appointment for me to see him." He put down the phone and looked up at old Mike. "You sure have opened up a can of peas, Mike," he said.

Mike smiled, and it was a warm smile. "If a few other big shots can see it as straight as you have, John, it'll be a real good-eating can of peas."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Best "First Story" in EQMM's 1961 contest—

ALICE SCANLON REACH's *In the Confessional*

8 other *new* stories including—

HAROLD Q. MASUR's *Squealer's Reward*

HELEN NIELSEN's *The Hopeless Case*

VICTOR CANNING's *The Missing Tins of Chicken Breasts*

an exceptional novelette—

HELEN McCLOY's *The Shadows Outside*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a new story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MICHAEL GILBERT**
TITLE:	***Pick Up the King***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Inspector Petrella
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The London police knew little about the King of Receivers, the Dragon of the Underworld. But they were sure he existed. Here is the tale of St. Petrella and the Dragon.*

THE QUEENS OWN ROYAL SOUTH London Rifles has its depot in Southwark High Street and has long recruited both its regular and territorial regiments from the tough boys who live thereabouts. How Detective Inspector Petrella became an honorary member of this excellent regiment and a welcome guest at its functions is a story which has never been fully or truthfully told before.

It started on a blustery evening in March. It had been a tiresome day. There had been a case of shoplifting, rendered more unpleasant than usual by the fact that children had been trained to do the stealing; there had been three larcenies from parked cars, a case of organized pocket-picking in a bus queue, and —that the measure should be pressed down and overflowing—a little matter of defalcation from the police canteen at Gabriel Street Station itself.

"Is everyone incurably dishonest," said Petrella to Superintendent Benjamin.

"Lucky the canteen job wasn't one of our boys," said Benjamin. "I never trusted that civilian caterer."

"Most of the people we've had in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

today didn't need the money—not really need it. Those dreadful women, smoking like chimneys, dressed up to the nines, training their *own* kids to lift stuff—"

"Opportunity," said Benjamin, "makes crime. Cut down the opportunities, you'll cut down the crime. You know who I'd like to put inside, Patrick? Receivers. Shut one of them up and you stop a hundred crimes that haven't yet been committed."

Petrella had heard all this before, and knew it to be true. But it had been too hard a day for easy optimism.

"Receivers are like the Hydra," he said. "Cut off one head and a hundred more spring up."

"Little men," said Benjamin. "You're talking about little men. People who'll hide a carton of stolen cigarettes in the washtub and sweat every time the doorbell rings. I'm not talking about little men, Patrick. I'm talking about the two or three who matter. You know you did your best job the first month you were here? When you ran in old Bonny. Pick up the King of Receivers and you can claim your pension."

Pick up the King, thought Petrella, as he left Gabriel Street that evening. He had one more call to make, in the Pardoe Street area, and then he was going home. Pick up the King. It sounded easy, when you said it. And some day, no doubt, somebody would do it. Even the smartest criminals made a mistake in the end.

But the King of Receivers had had a very long run. His name had been spoken in South London for twenty years or more. It has been whispered among informers—the little, spreading grass roots of the underworld.

The King was older than the oldest detective in X Division. He dealt in jewelery, in precious stones and metals of all sorts. So much was know. A man who pulled a job of this sort had only to wait for a telephone call. Sooner or later it would come: be at a certain place at a certain time. The place was somewhere, anywhere, in South London. The time was after dark. A car would draw up, a gloved hand hold out a packet of banknotes. The same hand would receive the parcel of stolen goods. Then the car would drive off. It was as simple as that.

There was no pause to check the jewelery, no time to count the notes. Both sides trusted the other because, in the long run, it paid them to do so. Just once, soon after the war ended, "Big" Lewis had the idea of substituting a packet of inferior stones for the diamonds he had lifted from Curliers. He had hidden the real diamonds at home, under a loose tile in the kitchen, with an eye to disposing of them subsequently at even greater profit. When he got home he found three plainclothesmen waiting for him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They knew about the loose tile, too. The King of Fences was quick.

It was from Big Lewis, who realized that he had been shopped, that the police had got most of their information about the King. It amounted to precious little. It was clearly a waste of time trying to trace him through the cars he used, for these would be "borrowed" from a car park and returned without the owners ever being aware of the use to which their property had been put. It was a method which left remarkably few loose ends.

The name itself might have some significance. In the curiously warped humor of the underworld, names might have two or even three meanings. (Had there not been another famous receiver known as Mr. Eleven, who turned out to be a middle-aged man also known as Johnny Cricket?)

Petrella had his own ideas about the King. He thought, maybe they were dealing with a dynasty—not one King, but a line of Kings. The stock in trade of such a man was knowledge: knowing who would be likely to pull certain jobs, knowing the disgruntled deckhands and too clever airline operatives who carry the stuff out of the country, knowing the buyers in Paris and Amsterdam, knowing how to get the money back to England. When the reigning King had made his pile, what was to prevent him from disposing of his know-how to a carefully chosen successor?

"A Hydra," said Petrella. "A dynasty of Hydras."

It was at this point in his reflections that a heavy brass ashtray came sailing through a window close ot his right cheek, covered him with splintered glass, ricocheted from a lamp-post, and came to rest in the gutter with a sullen clang.

Petrella shook the glass carefully out of his raincoat while he considered the matter.

The window through which the ashtray had come belonged, he saw, to the private bar of a small public house, The Kentish Giant. He was aware of raised voices and stamping feet within. There came another crash, then a progression of crashes, as though a child were dragging the cloth off a dinner table set for twelve.

He opened the door of the pub and looked inside.

The fight was almost over. In the middle of the room a subsiding group was composed of a stout man in shirt sleeves, a youth in an apron, a man in a blue suit, and a man in denim overalls. All of them were holding onto portions of a fifth man, a large man with a red face, a shock of close-cropped hair, and a pugnacious expression.

The large man heaved, like a balloon at its guide ropes. But his captors held firm. A steady flow of obscenity issued from all five—it rose, mingled, and ascended with the dust of their struggling.

Petrella stepped cautiously past

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the overturned table and through the litter of broken glasses on the floor.

"Lay off, now," said the stout man in shirt sleeves. "Lay off, do you hear, or we'll do you proper."

The red-faced man said an unprintable word and stamped on the stout man's toe. The group swayed dangerously.

"Stop it," ordered Petrella.

The note of authority was unmistakable. Petrella added, formally, "I'm a Detective Inspector, and I shall have to take you—" he addressed the red-faced man—"into custody for occasioning a breach of the peace."

"You take him right away," agreed the man in shirt sleeves. "Come in here, busting up my place, eh?"

"That's right," said the youth. It seemed to be the general opinion.

Petrella said, "Come with me."

The man, now unconstrained, swayed on his feet and blinked at him.

"Right away," said Petrella. He stepped up close, seized the man's forearm just above the elbow, and started to push. Surprisingly the man did not resist. There was no reason for him to do so. By any computation he was stronger and bigger than Petrella. But the fight seemed to be out of him. All the same, Petrella was relieved to meet a pair of policemen at the first corner.

He went with them to Southwark Police Station and saw to the formalities. The red-faced man, who gave his name as Albert Porter, was taken to a cell, and Petrella went home.

Before he went into Court next morning, he found time for a word with the landlord of The Kentish Giant.

"Albert's all right," said the landlord. "Generally he's quite all right. I've known him for years. So have the boys. Don't know what came over him last night."

The landlord's son said, "Before he started busting the place up, he was raving about that business of his, you know, the garage."

"I heard he'd been led up the old garden path," said the landlord. "Something he put his money into when he came out of the army. Maybe that's what set him off. Yes, I expect that was it. Funny thing, I've known it happen before. Like Jock Andrews. Lost his wife, brooded over it. Came in about a month later, had a couple of pints —not more than a couple of pints —and started breaking up the place."

Petrella steered the conversation back to Albert Porter.

"He was in the South Londons," said the landlord's son. "Company Sergeant Major. *My* Sergeant Major."

His voice had the disillusion of youth. Petrella sympathized with him. A tragedy in the Greek fashion—the god-like figure of the pa-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rade ground and the barrack hut reduced to a red-faced, brawling public nuisance.

"He had his troubles," said the landlord, "like I said. Came out two years ago, when they were thinning 'em out and paying 'em off. Officers and N.C.O's. Albert collected what was coming to him and put it in a garage. Diddun turn out so well."

"I see," said Petrella. It seemed to him a remote reason for going berserk in a friendly public house. "You'll probably both have to give evidence."

"Wooden want to do that," said the landlord.

Fortunately there was no need for anyone to give evidence. Albert Porter, revived by his night in the cell and spruced up in a way known only to ex-Sergeant Majors, stood four-square in the box and pleaded guilty. Petrella told his story, leaning heavily on the side of mitigation, and the prisoner was bound over.

Petrella caught up with him as he was leaving the court and said, "Come and have a cup of tea. I want to hear about your garage trouble."

Porter looked at Petrella doubtfully, grunted, and said, "I've told so many people about it, another can't hurt, I suppose."

"I'll pay for the tea," said Petrella. "You do the talking."

It was a sad story, but not a new one. Ex-Sergeant Major Porter, with two thousand pounds burning a hole in his pocket, had met Mr. Morris, a perfectly respectable citizen. At fifty yards on a foggy night he was still a respectable citizen, a pillar of an unspecified Church, a member of the local Chamber of Commerce. The source of Mr. Morris' wealth and respectability was the Roundabout Garage.

"The Roundabout," said Petrella. "Yes, of course I know it. Corner of Buckingham Road. I've often stopped there for a couple of gallons myself."

"It's a fine business," said Porter. "No fooling, a lovely business. Big repair shed. Lot of concessions for brand goods. Steady oil and petrol sales. Old Morris said he was aiming to get out gradually. Offered me a quarter share for two thousand pounds, *and* a job. I've done a lot of work on engines—I started in the R.E.M.E. It seemed to be just the job."

"So you paid down your money," said Petrella, "without getting a lawyer or an expert to check the proposition first, and you discovered the snag when it was too late to do anything about it. Right?"

Mr. Porter nodded glumly.

"What *was* the snag?"

"It's going to be pulled down, condemned. Road widening."

"I see. All the same—" Petrella considered. "If the Local Authority acquire the site and pull down the garage, they'll have to pay com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pensation. Good compensation. You'll get a quarter of that."

"Not me. The bank's got a mortgage on the place. For more than the compensation."

"What about all the gear?"

"The pumps and stuff belong to the Oil Company. They're got a mortgage on the place too. There's an awful lot of other stuff, but I doubt it'll fetch a thousand pounds at knockdown prices."

"I see," said Petrella again.

"The site's the real value of the place—the site and the connection. Once they've gone, there's nothing left. I paid two thousand pounds for nothing. That's the short and the long of it, and there's nothing anyone can do about it."

"Maybe. Maybe not," said Petrella.

He spent half an hour that afternoon with a dry but helpful little man in the office of the local planning authority, who unrolled the planning map and confirmed that the Roundabout Garage was, indeed, due to disappear.

"The real trouble," the little man said, "is Palace Crescent. It's residential, and packed with private cars. That means there's a constant flow of traffic where we least want it—here." He put his thumb down, a modern Roman Emperor, condemning a full arena. "Where it runs out into the main road. And the garage is right on the corner, the corner site."

"That's right," said Petrella. "That's what makes it such a marvelous place for a garage."

"It'll be a year or more before we get going on that bit. And when we do acquire it, your friend will get compensation."

"Nothing like enough, I'm afraid," said Petrella.

He said it absent-mindedly. For an idea had come to him. A wild, splendid, mad idea. An idea of curious ramifications and infinite possibilities; and he wanted time to ponder on it. He made some excuse, got out of the Council offices, and walked back in the direction of the Roundabout Garage.

A café across the street offered a handy observation point. He took a cup of tea across to a table by the window. Business at the garage was brisk. In the first half hour he counted twenty cars in and out. The petrol pumps, which Albert was serving, stood in a forecourt, at the point of the angle made by the two roads. Behind them stood the garage itself, with a main drive-in for cars and a glass door on the right, leading to an office. Behind the garage were the repair shops. The whole thing was one of those confused, casual, but workable jumbles, calculated to infuriate any right-minded planner.

At the end of the half hour Petrella's patience was rewarded. The office door opened and Mr. Morris came out. Petrella felt sure that it was Mr. Morris—a man of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about sixty-five, stocky, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, sporting a short but aggressive white beard. He stood for a moment, eyeing the hurrying traffic, as his Norse ancestor might have stood at the prow of his longboat, surveying potential victims.

He said something to Albert. They still seemed to be on friendly terms. Petrella was surprised at this, but reflected that in Albert's place he would probably have acted the same. The closer he stuck to the garage, the closer he stayed by his own two thousand pounds.

It was at this point that Petrella's original idea became greatly enlarged. It ceased to be nebulous, and became concrete. He paid his bill and went back to Gabriel Street.

"Go to a lawyer?" said Albert. "Throw good money after bad? I ought to have gone to one to start with, there I agree with you. But it can't do any good now. Morris hasn't broken any law that I know of."

"Try it," urged Petrella.

"Don't know any lawyers."

"I know lots of them," said Petrella. He considered the solicitors with whom he had had dealings and selected Mr. Trask as most appropriate to this problem. "And what's more I'll come with you."

"You think it'll do any good?"

"I've got an idea. Until we've talked it over with someone who knows the ropes, I can't tell if it's a good one or not."

"Might as well try it," said Albert.

Mr. Trask had an office near the Oval Cricket ground. He was big, heavy, full-jowled, and had hair so strong and black that he never looked properly shaved. He called Petrella by his first name, greeted Albert kindly, listened to his story, and perused the contents of the envelope of papers that Albert had brought along with him.

"He certainly did the thing in style," said Mr. Trask. "That's old Morris who owns the Roundabout, isn't it? Chap with a beard. Looks like a regular old pirate."

"All I can say is, it looked all right at the time," said Albert.

"Nice little business, I should have said. What's the catch? Oh, planning trouble."

Petrella explained about the planning trouble. Mr. Trask listened carefully, but continued reading the papers at the same time, a facility that busy lawyers seem to be able to acquire.

"Hullo," he said. "What's this? You didn't tell me he'd given you a debenture on the place."

Albert took the proffered document cautiously and said, "That's right. A debenture. A sort of mortgage, isn't it?"

"Yes and no," said Mr. Trask. "It's a mortgage to the extent that it gives you a charge on the place. Well, that's not much good be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause the Bank and the Petrol Company have got charges in front of you, if you follow me?"

"In a way," said Mr. Porter.

"But it gives you other remedies, as well. For instance, this entitles you to six per cent on your money payable monthly. Have you had that?"

"What I get from Morris is my wages. Twelve pounds a week, and he takes the P.A.Y.E. off himself, before he pays 'em."

"In that case," said Mr. Trask, folding his massive black hands on the desk, "your debenture interest is clearly in arrears. You should appoint a receiver at once."

The word hung in the dusty office.

"A receiver?" said Petrella.

"Not the sort of receiver you're thinking of. I mean a legal receiver. Any debenture holder or mortgagee has that remedy."

"What does a receiver do?"

"He takes charge," said Mr. Trask briskly. "His authority will be supported, if necessary, by the Court. He receives all rents, controls the bank account, runs the business, makes an inventory of the stock, arranges for periodical checks and audits."

"Can he exclude the proprietor?"

"If it was the proprietor who granted the debenture, certainly. It might be his duty to exclude him. Prevent him tampering with assets, you see."

"Do you—" As Petrella spoke he was conscious of a fierce and unhallowed joy as his idea began to fulfill itself. "Do you know any receivers?"

"Oh, dozens of 'em. Accountants mostly. I think Bowles would be the right man for you here."

"How do we appoint him?"

"Just sign a document I'll draw up for you. What's today? Friday. I'll get Bowles on the telephone. Give him a day to get organized. I suggest he goes in on Monday."

"Mr. Morris is rather an explosive personality," said Petrella. "He might try to make things a bit hot for Mr. Bowles."

"Bowles is quite capable of looking after himself," said Mr. Trask.

On Monday morning, as was his custom, Mr. Morris arrived at the Roundabout Garage at nine o'clock sharp. Petrella had been at his observation post in the café for half an hour. He wanted to see the curtain go up.

The first big moment arrived when Mr. Morris found that the office door was not only locked but apparently bolted, too. He walked round and put his nose up against the window—from which a light was showing. Then he rapped on the window and shouted something through it.

Petrella paid his bill, crossed the street higher up, and drifted back toward the garage. As he reached the corner, the door was opened and a tall, thin man, wearing steel spectacles, peered out.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you Mr. Morris?" the man inquired.

"That's right. I am," said Mr. Morris. "And who the flaming something-or-other are you?"

"My name," said the tall man severely, "is Bowles. I am a receiver, placed in possession of the premises by your debenture-holder, Mr. Porter. This is a copy of the instrument appointing me. The original has been filed with the Registrar of Companies."

Mr. Morris made a monosyllabic and, on the whole, improbable suggestion about the Registrar of Companies.

"If you have any proper communication to make," said Mr. Bowles, "I suggest you make it in writing." He started to close the door again, but Mr. Morris got his foot into it.

"You let me in," he said, "or I'll call a policeman. Keeping a man out of his own office!"

"There is a policeman on the corner," said Mr. Bowles. "In fact, I fancy he is coming this way now."

Petrella withdrew discreetly. He was inclined to agree with Mr. Trask that Bowles could look after himself.

So began the siege of the Roundabout. It lasted, in all, for three days. Petrella saw some of it and heard the rest from Albert, who continued to serve oil and petrol to customers unconscious of the drama that was being played around them.

The policeman had apparently decided in favor of Mr. Bowles. Mr. Morris had withdrawn, no doubt to consult his own solicitor. Not finding much comfort in the law, he had decided on a dawn attack, and had arrived, on Tuesday morning, at eight o'clock. Anticipating this, Mr. Bowles had arrived at half-past seven.

In the lunch interval Mr. Morris had sought out Albert.

"Really very nice to me, too," said Albert. "Stood me my lunch, and all. Of course, I told him it wasn't in my hands, really. He ought to approach me through my solicitors. Then he said some things about solicitors. Would have done you good to hear him."

"Keep it up," said Petrella. He thought for a moment, then added, "I'll tell you what. Suggest to Bowles that he ought to start making an inventory. All the old stuff in the repair shops and the store."

"It'd take him a month of Sundays."

"I don't think he'll actually have to do it. But let Mr. Morris hear about it. Tell him that Bowles has been asking you for the keys of the different lockers and boxes. Tell him that if he doesn't get them, he's going to start breaking them open. I think that will do the trick."

On Wednesday, in the early afternoon, Albert telephoned Petrella.

"Worked a treat," he said. "He's going to pay up."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I thought he might," said Petrella.

"Interest and everything. As long as I get Bowles out by tea time."

"Fine," said Petrella. "Of course, it won't do him much good. Because if you withdraw your receiver and take your money, the Bank or the Petrol Company could put him in again."

"I think he knows that," said Albert. "He's been to his lawyer, too. He doesn't seem to care. What he said was, as long as Bowles is out by tea time, I can have my money, all of it."

"And what does Bowles say?"

"As soon as Morris has paid me, he's got to go. Of course, as you say, he might be put back again by one of the others, but it would take a bit of time."

"All right," said Petrella. "That's fine." And he meant it.

He went round to Divison and had a word with Superintendent Benjamin.

"It's still a long shot," said Petrella. "But the odds are shortening."

"Four cars," said Benjamin. "No, make it five. We don't want any slip up now. One crew to block each of the roads, and one in reserve."

"We could observe from the café," said Petrella. "The proprietor's got an upstairs room he'd let us use. And a telephone—"

Much electricity was consumed that night at the Roundabout Garage. From their vantage point across the way, Benjamin and Petrella could follow Mr. Morris' progress, by the switching on and off of lights, from front office to back office, from back office to store room, from store room to the repair shops and the garage.

"Having a regular spring cleaning," said Benjamin. "How long's he going to be?"

"He'll be out before daylight," said Petrella.

The Superintendent acknowledged this with a grin which had very little humor in it. At five different points in the streets outside the garage, police cars stood, parked inconspicuously, one man dozing at the wheel, one in the back, one alert for the signal.

It was close to two o'clock in the morning when Petrella said, "I think he's coming now, sir."

The big garage doors creaked open. The lights inside were all out now. The length of Buckingham Road lay empty under its glaring orange lamps.

For a moment Mr. Morris stood there, as Petrella had seen him stand once before, head forward, white beard jutting. Then he disappeared. Side lights came on. A big old-fashioned car nosed out into the forecourt. As Mr. Morris climbed out and went to shut the garage doors behind him, Superintendent Benjamin was talking on the telephone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Blue four-door saloon," he said. "Coming now."

Then things started to happen.

The big car turned right out of the garage. Mr. Morris saw the police car draw out to block the road, slammed his own car into reverse, turned in a savage half circle, and started up one of the side streets. He spotted the second car too late. As Petralla ran out of the café he heard the scream of brakes and the noise of the impact.

Mr. Morris was still fighting—screaming a high, thin scream and fighting like a lunatic with two of the patrol-car men. The Sergeant stood by, a dripping crimson handkerchief to his face.

"Steady," said Petrella. "Steady. He's an old man."

"Old man my foot," said the Sergeant. "Went for my eyes."

"We want him in one piece," said Petrella.

The screaming had stopped now. Mr. Morris was lying on his back on the pavement, bubbling gently and dribbling into his beard. Petrella thought that the bubbling and dribbling were worse than the screaming.

Three evenings later, in the detective room at Gabriel Street, Superintendent Benjamin straightened his back and said, "That's the lot. All identified. Do you know he had the bits and pieces of more than twenty different jewel robberies in that car?"

"Hidden," said Petrella, "in more than twenty ingenious places round that garage. It took him eight hours to get them all out—and *he* knew where to look!"

"It's magnificent," said Benjamin. He was not a man given to enthusiasm, and when he used a word like magnificent it sounded like an accolade. "There's no doubt about it. We've got our hands on the King at last. We've been so busy the last three days I haven't even had time to ask how you spotted him."

"Part hunch," said Petrella. "A garage owner and second-hand car man seemed just right. Plenty of excuse to keep ready money about, plenty of hiding places. And you have to know something about cars if you're going to knock them off. But really it was the joke."

"Joke?"

"You know what they're like round here—names usually have more than one meaning. Puns and jokes, you know. A man living at the corner of Buckingham Road and Palace Crescent—what else *could* they call him?" He looked at his watch and said, "I've got to run. A date with the Sergeants and Warrant Officers of the South Londons. We're celebrating Albert's return to solvency."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: DON KNOWLTON

TITLE: *The Letter of the Law*

TYPE: Human Interest Legal Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Judge Bentley went "by the book"—he was a stickler for statutes. But the Skoda murder case disturbed him, and then something happened that sent him back to his boyhood on his Grandfather's farm . . .*

THE FACTS, AS REPORTED IN THE Hartville *Clarion,* were these: John Skoda, 23, his wife Mary, 21, and their infant daughter Anna, lived in a small rented house at 371 Ash Street. Rooming next door was Joe Kryslak, 33, unmarried, and, for the most part, unemployed.

Kryslak had been forcing his attentions on Skoda's wife and Skoda had been heard to say to Kryslak, "I'll kill you if I ever find you in my house again."

On July 17, when Skoda came home from the garage where he worked (carrying a big wrench in his pocket), a neighbor woman called to him, "Kryslak's in there and he's drunk."

Skoda ran into his house to find furniture overturned, the baby on the floor, and his wife trying to push off Kryslak.

Skoda jerked the wrench from his pocket, swung it hard, hit Kryslak on the back of the head, and killed him. The neighbor woman, standing in the door, saw it.

Skoda then ran to his car and headed out of town. He was picked up for speeding before it was even known that he was wanted for murder . . .

The case had come up before Judge Harrison Bentley, of the Court of Common Pleas. The Judge was, in a way, the leading citizen of Hartville. There were men in the town with more money; there were men who were more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brilliant; but for correctness in all respects and for utter integrity, there was no one in Hartville who approached the Judge.

On the bench he was an imposing figure. He was not a large man, but his chiseled features, set off by coal-black hair, gave an impression almost of majesty. The very way in which he wore his horn-rim glasses seemed indicative of deep learning. Here, one felt, was the Law—fair, impartial, omnipotent, inexorable.

All his life the Judge had done the right things. He was graduated at the top of his class. He had married a girl of excellent social position and considerable property. In building up a law practice he had scrupulously refrained from the defense of unsavory characters. He had no children, but was active in school matters. At social events he would take a cocktail, but only one. He gave to charity, generously but not ostentatiously.

His philosophy as to the law was simple. Principles that evolved over the years, with the aid of many generations of legal brains, became crystallized into statutes that were to be accepted and obeyed. A law was definitive. It did not say "perhaps," or "probably," or "in most cases." The penalties for infringement of the law were likewise defined. Therefore all a judge had to do, to be right, was to *know the law and stick with it*—and to it.

By the close of the afternoon of Friday, October 19, all the evidence in the Skoda case was in. The prosecution and the defense had rested. On Saturday the Judge played golf with Oscar Begg, President of the First National Bank. The Judge's game was not very good. Of course, Begg kept talking about the proposed municipal bond issue, but that was not what made it difficult for the Judge to keep his eye on the ball. On Monday he would have to summarize, and charge the jury, in the Skoda murder trial. His brain was turning round and round, seeking to formulate the exact wording he should use.

Of course the man was guilty. The only question was whether the verdict would be murder or manslaughter.

The prosecution had claimed that Skoda had brought home that heavy wrench with the premeditated intent of killing Kryslak with it, if he found him in his home—as Skoda had actually threatened to do.

The defense had claimed that Skoda had brought the wrench home to repair the plumbing in his kitchen, and that hitting Kryslak with it had been an unpremeditated act, committed instinctively, without intent to kill, and under circumstances so compelling that any husband would understand.

But Skoda had fled—he had run away. This, the prosecution maintained, presumed consciousness of guilt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Judge Bentley sliced another drive and sent it far into the rough.

"Oh, well," he thought, as he struggled through nettles and wild sunflowers to a thorn-apple thicket, "it is up to the jury to decide. All I have to do is to give them clear instructions as to the distinction between murder and manslaughter, and define the sentences, mandatory or permissive, as set forth in the statutes."

But he was not in a good frame of mind. There kept rising before him the picture of Mary Skoda, as she sat in the courtroom, with her baby daughter on her lap.

"Confound these nettles," he said, flailing about with his mashie, hunting for the ball. Oscar Begg came over to help.

"Hey!" exclaimed Oscar. "Look what we're under!"

The Judge looked up.

They stood under a black walnut tree. The leaves were off—but the big green spheres of the nuts, in their shucks, still clung in clusters on the branches.

"Ever gather them, when you were a boy?" asked Oscar.

Forty years fell off Judge Bentley's shoulders. He sat down on a log and instantly he was back on his Grandfather's farm—on the big slope northwest of the barn. There were other boys there, too—boys whose names he had long since forgotten. One of them shook the nuts from the tree. The rest gathered them in piles, and then knocked off the outer shucks with wooden clubs, and put the nuts in a basket. Fingers were stained a rich deep brown. And the smell—that pungent fragrance of October.

Judge Bentley picked up a fallen walnut in its shuck, and sniffed deeply. Oscar Begg sat down too.

"Like black walnuts?" the banker asked.

The Judge was too full of recollections—and something else he could not quite understand—to speak. He merely nodded.

"I've got a big black walnut tree in the back of my yard that is loaded," Oscar went on. "Never saw such a crop. We won't want them—my wife and I are leaving town tonight and will be gone for two weeks. Come over and get them if you want to."

The Judge did not find his ball. He put down another, and on the third swing he got back on the fairway. But he was still back on his Grandfather's farm.

The next morning the illusion still persisted. He could almost hear his Grandfather calling the cows, and he could almost smell the salt pork sizzling on the stove . . .

The Judge lived not far from the Court House, on an old but most desirable street, shaded by spreading elms. His yard backed up to a creek that ran parallel with the street. The little stream was clear and unpolluted. The brush and the trees on its banks had been allowed to grow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On Sunday morning the Judge and his wife sat opposite each other in the half-breakfast room, half-greenhouse that looked out over the back yard and the creek. They were lingering over eggs and coffee.

"We'd better get started," his wife said. "If we're going to get to the Richards' by one—"

"I don't think I care to go," said the Judge, unexpectedly.

"Now Harrison, the Stapletons will be there, and the Hardings—"

"I'm sorry," said her husband flatly, "but I'm not going. I'm just not in the mood."

But he persuaded his wife to go, and she took the car and headed north, to the Richards' house party. The Judge—it being Sunday, with no day help around the house—was left alone. Alone, with an inexplicable unrest in his system—and a nostalgic yearning to recapture a day, even an hour, of forty years ago . . .

He stepped to the edge of the creek behind the house and looked down. The sunshine filtering through the haze highlighted the autumn browns of the beeches and the reds of the maples. There were dancing colors in the weeds, and in the grass. The milkweed pods had exploded into fluffs of white. Every branch, every stalk, seemed endowed with a magic of its own. And Judge Bentley could have sworn that he smelled black walnuts, as plain as plain could be.

"Well, why not?" he asked suddenly, aloud. Oscar Begg's house also backed up to the creek, a short distance downstream from the Bentley house. To reach Begg's back yard the Judge had only follow the footpath through the brush alongside the creek.

A basket? No, a bag would be better. In his basement he found an old burlap sack.

But what should he wear? The trouble was that he literally did not have any old clothes; his wife always got rid of them. Then he remembered. Hanging in the garage was a torn pair of pants left by the gardener, and a ragged coat. In the attic he found a pair of old camping shoes. Further digging uncovered a moth-eaten felt hat. Arrayed in these, the Judge looked at himself in the glass.

Gone was the judge—the dignified, majestic figure of the Law. There stood before him, in the mirror, a most disreputable-looking character. Suddenly he felt like a boy let out of school—and then it came to him. Should he go all the way? Why not? Nobody would see him, walking down the footpath, screened by the brush. Nobody would notice him in Oscar Begg's back yard—the Beggs were away from home.

The Judge took off his horn-rim glasses. Except for fine print, he could see quite well without them. He took out his false teeth—they always did annoy him. Then he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

removed his toupee. There was not a soul in Hartville, except the Judge's wife, who knew that he was as bald as a baby. He had guarded the secret well.

With the moth-eaten hat jammed down on his head and the burlap bag over his shoulder, the Judge started down the path that followed the stream.

In a few moments he came on a patch of fall asters—frost flowers, his Grandmother used to call them. The pattern of purple starlets against the brown background of fallen leaves held him silent and wondering. There had been such a clump of asters behind the ice-house at the old farm. The plank walk, the pear tree, the grind-stone—every detail flashed clear in his memory.

Purple and brown, asters and leaves—why should he think at that moment of Mary Skoda and her baby? Judge Bentley sighed, and went on down the path.

Oscar Begg's black walnut tree was indeed loaded. The ground was covered with nuts, but there were also plenty still on the tree. It had not occurred to the Judge that he might climb the tree. But that was the proper procedure—any boy knew that. The tree branched low—going up would be as simple as mounting a ladder.

Up went the Judge. For a few precious, fleeting moments he was just ten years old. He stomped on one branch after another, and reveled in the music of the nuts falling to the ground below. He was just about to step to an even higher perch when a yell came from beneath the tree.

The Judge looked down. Looking up into the tree was a policeman.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Getting walnuts," replied the Judge, feeling silly. And as he climbed down out of the tree a woman came running from the adjoining yard.

"That's him!" she said to the officer. "It's him all right. I can tell by his clothes but I'd know him anyway."

The Judge reached the ground and said to the officer, "Now, what is this all about?"

"You're asking *me?*" said the policeman. "I'm asking *you.*"

"I told you. I'm gathering walnuts."

"What you're doing," said the officer, "is trespassing and stealing property."

"But you don't understand," said the Judge. "Mr. Begg told me I could come and take these nuts—"

"Baloney," interrupted the officer. "Are you sure, Mrs. Kilroy?"

"Of course I'm sure," she said. "He's the man who was trying to break into my house yesterday. That's when I called you. So when I saw him again today of course I phoned—"

"Wait a minute!" broke in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Judge. "Madame, with all due respect to your sincerity, you are completely mistaken. I realize, officer, that you deserve an explanation. I'm a neighbor and a friend of Mr. Begg's. I live just up the street. Mr. Begg and his wife have gone out of town, and he suggested to me that I might like to have some of these walnuts. That's all there is to it."

The policeman gave him a withering glance.

"Oh, so you live just up the street, eh?" he said mockingly.

"Yes! Why, you know me. I'm Judge Bentley, of the Common Pleas Court."

The policeman wagged his head sadly from side to side.

"Well, if that doesn't beat everything!" he said. "A bald-headed old tramp like you trying to pass himself off as Judge Bentley!"

In a panic the Judge reached for his hat. It wasn't there! It had fallen off while he was in the tree.

The Judge said not another word. Oh, he could protest to high heaven. He could demand that the officer summon the clerk of the court, or the bailiff, or other people who could confirm his identity. But that was unthinkable. For in that case he would stand revealed without his teeth and his toupee! The only possible safety—for the moment, at least—lay in the officer continuing to assume that he was not, could not *possibly* be, Judge Bentley.

"Mrs. Kilroy," said the officer, "while I hold him here, would you mind calling the station and telling them to send out the wagon?"

Swiftly the officer stepped forward and frisked the Judge's pockets. They were empty.

When the police car came they rode in silence to the station. There the man at the desk looked up in inquiry.

"Prowler," explained the officer who had made the arrest. "Vagrant, probably. No identification on him. Caught stealing nuts. Suspected of housebreaking. Better put him away until *tomorrow morning*."

The Judge stiffened. At 9 A.M. the next morning he was supposed to be on the bench, charging the jury in the Skoda case.

"What shall we book him on?" asked the man at the desk.

"Darned if I know," answered the officer. "Suspicious character, I guess. I think he's loony. He says he's Judge Bentley."

"What!" And the man at the desk laughed loudly.

"Come to think of it," he said finally, "he does look a bit like the Judge. It's a scream."

They took him to the jail. It was, ironically enough, in the basement of the courthouse.

The cell in which they put him already had an occupant—a man with enormous shoulders, clad in a ragged red sweater and faded corduroy pants.

"Welcome to the abode of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

transgressors," said the big man. "What are you in for, Mac?"

The Judge made no answer. He had some hard thinking to do—the situation was impossible!

Judge Bentley, *in jail,* in tramp's clothes, minus hair and teeth, charged with nut stealing and housebreaking—what a story for the newspapers! How the town would laugh! Toupee—ha, ha, ha! Oh, that would be the end, the very end. He would never be able to hold up his head again.

But unless he had them phone someone to come and identify him, how could he get out of jail and appear in court next morning? What if he *didn't* appear? The jury would take their seats. The bailiff would prepare to open court—and lo, no Judge!

They would phone his home—no answer, his wife was not due back until Wednesday. They would go to his house and find that his bed had not been slept in. Judge Bentley missing! The news would go out over the air; it would make headlines. And then—?

Round and round on the treadmill, and the Judge could find no satisfactory answer—no answer that would save him from public humiliation . . .

Hours later there was a sudden rattle at the door. A little man pushed two supper trays into the cell, and departed.

"Well, Mac," said the big man in the red sweater, "if you won't talk, maybe you'll eat."

Absently the Judge looked at his tray.

"Beans again," observed the big man.

Mechanically the Judge, toothless, went through the motions of eating.

"Look," said the Judge's cellmate. "I've been cooped up here for three days, with nobody to talk to. It was all right for Byron to say 'there is society where none intrudes,' but that was on the seashore, not in jail. It gets tough in here, all by yourself."

The Judge looked up in surprise.

"Man is a gregarious animal," the man went on. "It isn't human for you just to sit there, hour after hour, like Rodin's 'Thinker.' Let us talk! You be Johnson and I'll be Boswell—or vice versa, if you prefer. I care not what paltry offense you have committed against society. From the looks of you, I'd guess you were merely trying, in your small way, to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth. Am I right?"

"I was just trying to get something to eat," said the Judge.

"Then they may not make it too tough for you. But I don't know. The Judge in this town is a holy terror."

"Is that so?" asked the Judge.

"He knows not the quality of mercy. He cares only for facts and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

statutes. In his scheme of things there is no place for human frailty —it ought not to exist. The word 'sympathy' is not in his vocabulary."

"How do you know so much about him?" asked the Judge. "Did you ever see him in court?"

"No, I've never seen 'Bloodless Bentley," as they call him, but I know a lot about him. You see, I am —or rather, I was—a linotype operator on the Kane City *Blade*. You know Kane City? It's only ten miles from here. Well, I type set all the *Blade's* stories about the trials here. And unlike most typographers I read what I set. In fact, I read everything I can lay my hands on— and I drink. That's my trouble, reading and drinking."

The big man sighed.

"Old Bentley may let *you* off with ten days," he went on, "but *me*—I'll get the book. Driving while intoxicated. Not just drunk —pie-eyed, plastered, absolutely pifflicated. What that damned old Puritan will do to me—"

He drew his finger across his throat.

"I would have been up before him by now, but he's been on a murder case. Oh, well! 'This, too, will pass'—"

The big man smiled unexpectedly. It lit up a peculiarly ugly face.

"Cheer up, Mac," he said. "Suppose we *had* been righteous, rich, and famous? 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave.' But I *am* darned tired of just waiting in this cell."

He began pacing up and down.

"Oh," he mused, "I suppose we have to have laws and judges and all that sort of thing. But I have often reflected upon the tyranny of justice."

In spite of his predicament the Judge's mounting curiosity got the better of him.

"What do you mean by that—the tyranny of justice?" he asked.

"The law," said the big man, "of necessity groups offenses in categories and provides specific penalties. This is all right in theory, but the whole system is based on averages and may not properly apply to any individual case. There are moral principles that at times should take precedence over the letter of the law, and for this the law makes no allowances. The law says this, the law says that. We are caught in the strait jacket of the law."

"But don't you see—"

"Here's what I mean. Under the law a man who robs a store to get money so that his sick child can have the doctor is just as guilty, and deserves exactly the same penalty, as a man who robs a bank to get money to buy a chorus girl champagne."

"But—"

"I say," the big man kept on, "that justice should give due consideration to circumstances. Now take my case, for instance."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Judge had almost revealed himself as not being what he appeared to be. Just in time he settled back to listen.

"You see, Mac, I've always been a drifter and a no-good. Mostly because of curiosity and whiskey. I wanted to see the country and I wanted to read and I wanted to drink with people and talk to them. So I learned how to operate a linotype machine. A linotyper can go to any city, pick up a few weeks' work, and then move on to another town. That's what I did, year after year. Outside of working hours I divided my time about equally between the bars and the public library."

"The library!" exclaimed the Judge.

"Sure. I had a thirst for bourbon that was equaled only by a thirst for literature. That's how I got my moniker—they all call me the Professor. But this is no sob story, Mac. I am not one whom 'unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster.' Everything that has happened to me is nobody's fault but my own."

The big man paused. The Judge was suddenly aware of a vast silence. No footsteps overhead, no voices below. Of course, that late on Sunday, there would be nobody upstairs in the courthouse except the night man on jail duty. But downstairs—

"Are we the only people in the jail?" asked the Judge.

The Professor nodded.

"By the way, why did they put me in with you? Why not a separate cell for each of us?"

"Traditional," replied the Professor. "Following precedent, no doubt, like the law. Although I must say that the jail business is mighty slow in Hartville on a Sunday."

"Result of sound law enforcement," murmured the Judge.

"What was that?"

"Nothing," said the Judge hastily. "Go on with your story."

"Well, what happened was that as I grew older I began to get bored with drifting. So when I landed in the *Blade* composing room in Kane City, I thought I'd see if I could stick it out—stay reasonably sober, work steady, keep the job. Well, I didn't do too well. They got to calling me Old Unreliable. Oh, I would have periodic lapses of sobriety, but 'beaded bubbles winking at the brim' I could not withstand. And then, Mac, I met a woman."

The big man gestured dramatically.

"Oh, hers is not a face to launch a thousand ships," he said. "She's a schoolteacher. What I found, Mac, was something I had never found before—a woman who loved books, a woman who had a love for poetry and a profound respect for good prose. So I asked her to marry me. She said that if I'd promise to quit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drinking she'd think about it. She told me to mull it over very carefully, and believe me, I did. I finally wrote her a letter saying yes, I would. And back came a letter from her saying yes, in that case, *she* would. Now, Mac, I want you to understand my position at that moment."

The Professor hunched his shoulders and pointed a wagging finger.

"I was due to see her the next afternoon. That gave me one last chance to say farewell forever to John Barleycorn—and I can assure you that was no light project. Strenuous measures were called for. In the morning I would climb on the well-known wagon, but this night Bacchus would claim me for his own. And so, Mac, I proceeded to hang one on that would have been the envy of Commodus."

He grinned ruefully.

"There's a joint halfway between Kane City and Hartville where I went to say, 'Bye, bye, bourbon.' This is what they tell me I did. They say I got in my car, drove it into Hartville at eighty miles an hour, almost sideswiped an ambulance, almost ran down an old lady, went right through a man's yard and through his back fence and through another yard on the next street, and finally smashed into a tree. And when the police dragged me out of the wreck and asked me what the hell I thought I was doing, I told them I was Ben-Hur."

He shook his head sadly.

"Now, Mac, I ask you," he said, "can I expect that human icicle, that bloodless Bentley, to understand *why* a man would go out and get that drunk because he was going to get married and stay sober ever after?"

The Judge was silent. For some minutes nothing was said. It had been dark outdoors for a long time, and the single bulb of the cell gave out a dim, hard light.

"I've been thinking," the big man started up again, "that if I could just get out of here I could somehow work it out. I could thumb a ride to some town where there's an office of the typographical union, where they know me, and I could borrow enough money to get so far away they wouldn't try to bring me back here—it would cost them too much, and after all, I didn't actually hurt anybody. Then I could send for my fair lady, and we'd get married. Indeed a 'consummation devoutly to be wished'! But no, no—"

His great shoulders shook.

"No, Bentley will give me ninety days at least, and take away my driver's license forever, and probably fine me to boot. I don't have any money to pay, so I'll be a jailbird and won't be able to get a job anywhere and of course the girl will never marry me then! I tell you, Mac, the prospect is almost enough to make me wonder whether it might not be worth while trying to escape."

"What!" exclaimed the Judge.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let's consider it coolly, as an academic exercise in speculative thought," the Professor went on. "This building is pretty old. The former bastions of strength may have developed unsuspected weaknesses. For example: take a careful look at the ceiling beam that holds the upper ends of the bars on the front of this cell."

The judge looked up. Where the bars entered their sockets, the beam was split along its entire length.

"I have a suspicion," the Professor continued, "that beam is not only split, but rotten. I have an idea that a determined man might be able to pry those bars out."

The Judge's heart gave a great leap. The big man drew close.

"Listen," he said. "About midnight the night man watching the jail sneaks out for a cup of coffee. I know because I can hear that back door, at the head of the stairs, open and close. Then's our chance."

"But how could you get at those bars?" the Judge was amazed to find himself saying.

"Lock your hands and I'll climb up on your shoulders."

Up went the Professor. He pushed and probed. Down he came.

"Loose," he pronounced.

Break jail! The Judge tingled with a sensation he had never felt before. He thought suddenly of the Count of Monte Cristo, and a queer elation seized him. He faced the Professor squarely.

"See here, my friend," he said in a determined voice, "if we're going to attempt this it must be done right. Just how would you propose to do it?"

"You boost me up," said the Professor. "I squeeze through and drop down on the outside. Then I reach my hands in through the bars and boost you up and you crawl through."

"Okay," said the Judge. "When we hear the back door click, we try it. *Then* what do we do?"

"Beat it, of course."

"Where to? They'll have searching parties out for us—"

"We'll have to take our chances."

"Oh, no, we won't," said the Judge. "I know this town and you don't. If you want me to go along with you on this you'll have to do exactly as I say, and no questions asked."

There was authority in that voice. The Professor stared at the Judge in considerable surprise.

"Okay, Mac," he agreed. "You're the boss."

So they waited—and listened. At last they heard the back door click. Five minutes later they were out in the yard, back of the jail.

"Follow me and keep quiet," ordered the Judge.

He led the way—into a garage and through it into a lane, around the corner onto a side street, down that street to an alley, into a back yard and up a shrub-bordered driveway, through a vegetable garden and over a fence, and then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

along a dimly lit, tree-shaded street for several blocks. On a corner the Judge halted.

"One block more," he said, "and we come to Ridge Street. That's a main street, and we have to cross it."

Cautiously they proceeded. Except for several cars quite a distance away, Ridge Street was empty. But then the high wail of a police siren split the air and looking toward downtown, they could see a flashing red light.

"We'll have to run for it!" said the Judge. "Come on!"

And run they did—across the street into a yard, past the house, through a flower garden, onto a patch of grass and then beyond it down a short steep hill overgrown with brush and brambles, landing in a wild crab-apple thicket. The yard was that of Oscar Begg. They had just passed under the black-walnut tree where the Judge, that afternoon, had fallen into the clutches of the law.

"Lie down," commanded the Judge.

They heard a police car roaring past. A second siren sounded, farther away.

"I want to explain to you," whispered the Judge, "what we're going to do. We're in a little valley that runs behind a row of houses. There's a path up the valley, along the creek. The path is completely hidden by brush and trees. Up the path there's a house where the people are away. We're going to get in that house. Once inside, we're safe until we can figure out what to do next."

"Now wait a minute," the Professor put in. "I don't like the idea of breaking into somebody's home—"

"We won't have to break in. The back door is unlocked. I've cased the joint."

The Judge was surprised at how easily the words came.

He led the way to the path. They made their way in careful silence. They had just reached a spot where the creek widened into a cat-tail swamp when a ray of white light shot over their heads, and a voice said, "I doubt whether they'd be down here, but you never can tell."

A second shaft of light pierced the brush. "Might as well be sure," answered another voice.

"Into the ditch!" whispered the Judge. "Flat on your face! Down under the weeds! Nose in the mud!"

Above them was a noisy thrashing about, the searchers playing their flashlights back and forth, up and down. But how could two dark humps, looking like rotten logs under the cat-tail shadows, have been suspected of being human beings?

How long, wondered the Judge, how long . . .

The October mud was cold, but he did not dare risk even a shiver. What were those stories he had read, as a boy, about escaped slaves hiding in bayou backwaters?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Strange to be lying thus, a hunted thing, only a few rods away from that patch of purple asters, with their brown background of fallen autumn leaves, that had held him wondering that very afternoon. Strange that *he* would be fleeing—

Suddenly there rose before him, once again, the face of Mary Skoda, as she had sat in the courtroom, with her baby, and the face of John Skoda—thin, taut, pale, half defiant.

John Skoda—

He, too, had fled.

The four words seemed to echo through the cat-tail swamp.

At last the sweeps of the flashlights grew dimmer; the voices drew farther away.

"Come on, Professor," said the Judge, and they picked their way out of the ditch. Within a matter of minutes they were at the back door of the Judge's house. The Judge opened the door, and in they walked. They were in the kitchen. The Judge pressed a button, and on went the lights.

"For God's sake," began the Professor, in alarm.

"Relax," said the Judge. "Turning on the lights will only mean to the neighbors that the folks who live here have come home. What would you say to a nice hot cup of coffee?"

The Judge seemed to have an uncanny instinct as to the location of the coffee can and the coffee pot. In no time coffee was perking.

"So far, so good," said the Professor, "but where do we go from here?"

"I trust you realize," remarked the Judge, "that we are now fugitives from the law? That if we're caught, we may be sent up for a long stretch?"

The Professor nodded.

"Well, now that I've gone this far, I might as well, as the saying goes, be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. Professor, I told you I had cased this place. I intend to take anything I find in this house that I want. That will be robbery. That's *my risk*. I don't think you want to be involved in that risk. Therefore I think, Professor, that you and I should part company, and fast. But to get out of here, to make your getaway, you are going to need money. And you are going to need a change of clothes. A description of you will have been sent out as wearing no hat and a red sweater. So you stay here—holler if a car should turn in the drive—and I'll take a look around upstairs."

A few minutes later the Judge came down, laden with an assortment of hats, coats, and sweaters.

A soft felt hat fitted the Professor perfectly. They finally succeeded in stretching a blue sweater over his bulging shoulders, and over that, a long, loose raincoat.

"Take a look at this," said the Judge. Out of a pocket he took a wallet, and out of it, a hundred dollars in bills.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here," he said to the Professor. "That's your share."

"But I don't want to take stolen money!" protested the Professor.

"Are you going to get away and marry the girl, or are you going to spend half your life in jail?" asked the Judge harshly.

The Professor slowly reached out his hand.

"Promise me only one thing—that you'll stay on the wagon." said the Judge.

"So help me God," the Professor said solemnly.

The Judge put the bills in the Professor's big fist.

"Now," said the Judge, "walk out of here, down the drive, turn right, and keep on walking to the second red light. That's where a main east-and-west highway crosses Ridge Street. The through buses stop at that corner. Get the first bus out of the county. Now get going!"

"Well, goodbye, my friend, and good luck," said the Professor. "Remember—'sweet are the uses of adversity'."

It was with an emotion that was strange to him that the Judge saw the big figure of the Professor disappear into the night . . .

At precisely nine o'clock the next morning, the Honorable Harrison Bentley took his place on the bench of the Court of Common Pleas.

He was indeed an imposing figure. His regular, chiseled features, the firm line of his jaw, his horn-rim glasses, his coal-black hair, combined to give an impression almost of majesty.

The courtroom was crowded. The jury sat expectantly. At the table were counsel for the prosecution and the defense. The reporter for the Hartville *Clarion* had pencil in hand. There was Mary Skoda with her baby, looking up with troubled eyes. And there sat the accused, John Skoda—thin, taut, pale, half defiant.

Everybody knew that John Skoda had killed Joe Kryslak. How would the Judge charge the jury?

The Judge began with a brief summation of the claims of the prosecution and the defense, then proceeded, with dry clarity, to define the degrees of guilt and the penalties attached thereto. The *Clarion* reporter began taking notes: with premeditation, first degree murder, death; killing unpremeditated but in heat of passion, second degree murder, life; blow not delivered with intent to kill, manslaughter first degree, minimum twenty years.

"I'll bet he gets life," the *Clarion* reporter whispered to his neighbor.

But then the Judge paused, and with an unconscious gesture he took off his horn-rim glasses. He leaned earnestly at the jury.

"Now for a concluding point," he said, "which I wish to make very clear. Our statutes have been written, by trial and error, over the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years. But that does not mean that the law should constitute a strait jacket. Justice is not a tyrant. The mandatory provisions of the law are therefore tempered by optional provisions which may be exercised, in varying degrees, by the trial judge and the jury."

Judge Bentley continued gravely. "A statute, by its very nature, cannot take cognizance of special situations or extenuating circumstances. But a jury can. In a trial such as this, on which hang the life and liberty of a man, the jury is permitted far more latitude than is generally realized.

The Judge paused only a moment. "There is nothing in the law which prohibits this jury from bringing in a verdict of Not Guilty —if you so choose to do. In that case, under the letter of the law, I shall be compelled to set the prisoner free. You may now retire to your room and search your souls."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said the reporter for the Hartville *Clarion*.

That night John Skoda, a free man, had dinner with his wife and baby.

Judge Bentley also had dinner with his wife, who had decided to come home earlier than she had planned.

"What did you do Sunday afternoon?" she asked.

"Just fooled around," he answered.

The newspaper lay on the chair. *Jail Breakers Roam Countryside,* said the headline. People were warned of two desperadoes—one a gigantic ruffian, the other a lunatic.

The Judge's wife picked up the paper.

"Why, Harrison," she said a moment later, "the paper says that crazy man claimed he was you!"

"It's amazing what can happen to a deranged mind," said the Judge.

That night he went to bed early.

His conscience was not easy. It would give him trouble, he knew, for many a day. But just the same—

Deep within him was a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of the rightness of things. And across his consciousness, just before he fell asleep, flashed that pattern of wild asters—stars of purple on a background of brown autumn leaves.

OUR APOLOGIES—

Due to dead-line difficulties, we were unable to include the usual paperback listing in this month's issue. And as long as it is being deleted, this seems a good time to settle a point: Many of our readers have voiced a preference for more fiction and fewer features. What's your vote? Shall we abandon the paperback listing? We'd appreciate a post card at—EQMM. 505 PARK AVENUE, N. Y. 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meet a new private eye—"Getz Gets 'Em"—habitat, Hawaii . . . But let him describe himself: "I'm not tough. I haven't shot a luscious blonde in months. I don't carry a gun. I'd rather duck a punch than take one or throw one . . . But if you want the dirt on somebody, I know where the dirt is piled up around here and I have the tools to dig it with."

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

by WILLIAM W. STUART

THERE'S NO FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH in Honolulu. It's a nice place, sure; I'll never argue that. The natural Hawaiian climate comes closer to matching the travel folders than anything the Pacific side of first-rate air conditioning. The people, by and large, are a cheerful, relaxed lot, all sizes, shapes, and colors. Sure, I like the place—which isn't to say I don't have my troubles in and with it.

Me, I came here away back, just before the War, as a bright young man of, maybe, twenty-five. Now, some twenty years later, I'm a not-so-bright, middle-aged man of, maybe, forty-five; some days, definitely more. So you should question anything the travel ads say about a land of youth. Anything else, sure, go ahead, believe it; it could be true. But a fountain of youth, no, that we don't have. But that will never stop people from looking for it.

Youth, ah, youth; that's what everyone wants, isn't it, even in Hawaii? Everyone, that is, except those who have it—and are too young to appreciate it.

Well.

I, by force of circumstance, am what I call an investigator. Nothing glamorous, or notably profitable. I investigate what people want investigated. Sure, it's mostly divorce and "What's the old buzzard really doing those 'late nights at the office'?" All right; if people don't cheat, I don't catch them at it—and not always when they do. The marital mess may be messy, but it's my bread and butter; fish and poi; squid and rice.

Marital messes, and, once in a while, a sucker who has been or is about to be suckered and is too embarrassed to call in the cops. The has-beens I listen to with great sympathy and brush off with a kind word—which is about all they're still able to pay me for. The about-to be's—ah!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One morning last week I came back to my downtown office and termite sanctuary after a slow coffee break at eleven. The answering service (that's my office staff—a sexy, blonde answering service that gives me messages in a condescending, recorded-sounding tone of voice) gave me a call from the Royale Hotel, out Waikiki way. A Mr. G. Harlow Winster had a something he wanted investigated and had found me in the Yellow Pages, which is where I hang out during coffee breaks.

The Royale? The live ones who can afford the Royale are live indeed, if often senile. I got out there inside of twenty minutes and with my coat and tie on, too. With Mainland Visitor types, the coat and tie helps make them feel they have met a substantial businessman from back home; it gives them confidence.

The desk sent me up to one of the tower suites and I felt better every floor. The whole place smells like money and the higher the richer.

The door was opened by a slim-girdled, elder-statesman type of bright young man—my age or a little more, but used to much better barbers.

"I'm Herb Getz," I told him, handing him a card—one of the ones without the *Getz Gets 'Em* slogan on it. His suspicious, fish-blue eyes investigated me right through—to the dog-eared credentials and lack of folding money in my wallet. Not a gullible sort, that one, and seeing him dimmed my dream of a fat fee plus an expense account filled out like a thin girl's brassiere. "Mr. Winster?"

A fox pass. How gauche can you be? If it's me on a drowsy, subtropic morning, I can fox-pass a round of gauche in par for any standard course. This, as I should have guessed, was Mr. Winster's executive secretary. And, obviously, the idea of dragging me into this, whatever it was, wasn't his idea. He let me in though, into the suite living room.

A fat old man with a bald head shining pink in the center of a neat gray fringe came in from the balcony. He had a hibiscus-flowered sports shirt draped over a noble paunch and Bermuda shorts drooping on scrawny plucked-chicken legs. A familiar enough type: they spend a hard-driving life piling up money; then one day, spring probably, they wake up, hear some big-mouth bird sound off, feel a soft breeze—and all at once the charm of adding another ten or twelve millions to the pile is gone. The hell with it. The time has come to quit slaving and enjoy life. And that's the time they find out—the hard way—that the size of the money pile is in an inverse ratio to the amount of life there is left to spend it on. Then? Some turn back to making money—to backing shows, dolls, artists, ball clubs, hate-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the-world societies. And some of them just wander around, lost little old boys. We see quite a few over here and while it is hard for me to feel sorry for multiple millions, I sometimes try—especially if there seems a chance of some of it coming my way.

A well-stacked—overstacked maybe, to some, but I like to be comfortable—blonde, not so young now but still fair game, followed the old gentleman into the room. Not his wife. Must be his long-time "personal secretary." She looked a little tired, a little unsure. Probably by now she had to learn to type and hung on mostly from habit. What those old boys chase is youth.

While I was making all these acute, detective-type observations, the Old Man came in and sat heavily on a silk-covered punee. The blonde joined him. The executive spirit of efficiency kept standing by the door, ready to open it for me. Nobody asked me to sit down but I did, on the straight chair by the telephone table across the room. No bald effrontery, you see; just businesslike.

'Hmph!" The Old Man glared at me through heavy glasses with watery, wary, bloodshot eyes. "You're Getz, eh? Hear you're a tough operator, real private eye?"

"No, sir," I said, dead-pan, all business. "I'm no eye. I'm not tough. I haven't shot a luscious blonde"—just the suggestion of a nod to the upholstered dish beside him—"in months. I don't carry a gun. I'd rather duck a punch than take one or throw one and I never drink on duty. Until a client hires me, of course, I'm not on duty." I try not to burn any bridges. "What I am, Mr. Winster, is an investigator. I'm not a gunman, a fighter, a moral crusader, or a law enforcement officer. But if you want the dirt on somebody, I know where the dirt is piled up around here and I have the tools to dig it with. If it's someone from out of State, I have Mainland connections, and if it's someone from here, chances are I already know him or know of him. I'm an investigator, Mr. Winster. If that's what you want, I'm your man."

"Oh?" He flicked a somehow wistful glance out the doors to the balcony overlooking the broad Pacific and then back at me.

"Yes, sir, best in the Islands."

"So. Well, all right, Getz. You are what I was looking for, I suppose." Not enthusiastic but at least he was warming up. "Perhaps you can help us. There is a—ah—young man, a very unusual young man, extraordinary perhaps, on whom I wish a report. I consider it important—and completely confidential. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. I'm a quiet man."

That got me the thin ghost of a smile. "All right. Frobius," he snapped at the executive one, "come on, come on. Relax. Tell him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frobius nodded all around, and sat down. "Yes, sir. Well, the fact is —uh—Mr. Getz,"—there was a big, executive decision whether or not to put in the "Mr."; I felt fine to have won it—"Mr. Winster and Miss Drew have met a—uh—beach boy. I believe the term is. He gave Miss Drew a surfing lesson. There was some—uh—conversation. She suggested that he speak to Mr. Winster and, later, to myself. He has a most remarkable story."

I relaxed a point or two in my straight chair. All beach boys have remarkable stories. It's part of their business. Beach boys don't, perhaps, operate on what you could call a real high moral level. But they're a relaxed, pleasant, easy-going lot; sociable; easy operators. They make a buck here, a chick there, an old bat in a cabana—and juicy tips most of the way around. Other than that, they sing, dance, drink, lie on the beach in between Visitors' surfing and swimming lessons. They enjoy life and that's all they look for. Their code, which seems reasonable enough to me, is to take all that is freely offered but never to be greedy and grab for more. Was this something different?

"The—uh—fact is, this beach boy, a very fit-looking young man, claims he is over eighty-seven years old."

I sat up straight again. This was something different. "Tell me," I said, leaning forward a touch to look extra alert.

So Frobius told me, in a stuffy, business-English style, like a report to the Board of Directors. But he held me. It was, basically, the same old pitch that some long-gone Indian sharper had used to sell Ponce de Leon on Florida real estate; but it had some bright new twists to it.

How could anyone go for that today? Well, how many women go for it, every day, at the beauty salons? How many men are conned into trying to buy it in their breakfast food, hair oil, after-shave, or vitamin pills? It's a magnet that never wears out.

The main character in this story was an old, old man, a local. He was broke, his wife sick, too proud for welfare. He finally managed to get a job as cook with one of those Foundation-financed scientific expeditions that pass through here now and again. This one was checking ocean currents, fish, and what all. They shipped out, south. Typhoon season. Storm. Wreck. The old man survived—no one else. He was washed ashore on a beach on "the island of big stone face." Must be Easter Island, I thought.

"What was the ship?" I broke in with the question to prove I was listening.

"The *Selphie*."

Good story. That checked. I remembered, there was a ship of that name that went out of here a few years back and disappeared. Never did find out what happened. This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a beach boy who took the trouble to make a story right.

Anyway, the old man was saved. There were natives on the Island, but according to the story they wouldn't have anything to do with the old man. So the poor old guy had to try to stay alive, living all alone on the barren south coast of the Island that was some sort of tabu to the natives.

It was tough. A few roots, a little wild sugar cane to chew. Damn little water to drink. He had to get most of his food from the ocean—seaweed, shellfish, whatever he could lay a hand and shaky old tooth on. And there, in the ocean, was where he found the fabled fountain of youth.

The old man ran across a section on the reef off the Island where he used to go at low tide; the seaweed there was thicker, the fish friskier, the mussels more muscular. One day he went a little farther, through the weed, and found a wide bare spot. No seaweed, no fish, and the water looked funny. A fresh water spring? What else? He dove and drank. Then he started bringing gourds out to get his water supply there. Had a funny taste and smell, but he kept drinking it. Very special water; special chemicals, something, in it.

Yeah. Eight months he was there, out to the spring almost every day, and I will spare you the details about his fighting the sharks and the giant squid. After eight months the eighty-six-year-old man was a fine, hearty thirty in appearance—and with a full, sturdy set of new teeth.

"Oh?" I broke in at that point. "Well, that's quite a story, isn't it?" I put a little edge on it. But as I looked around, nobody seemed to notice what I'd said—or even that I'd said anything. They looked dreamy.

"Anything else?"

Of course. This was a real storyteller. The Islanders knew about the spring too, 'way back in something B.C. The fountain of youth, man's age-old dream. So nobody on the island died. Probably why they made the mysterious stone idols, I suppose, just to pass away the endless time after a few hundred years of getting tired of other, more standard recreations. Overpopulation? Yes, at first, but then, while they looked and felt young, there was a gradual loss of fertility. No more babies. And that was the end of them. One by one, as the centuries rolled by and they stayed young and vigorous, the population dropped. Accidents, fights, drownings, typhoons. Some just swam out into the ocean to get away from it all and, at last, the final group loaded into a great war canoe and sailed away to the West, presumably to look for new blood and fertile women. Away from the spring, they began to age again; never made it back. End of Easter Islanders.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, eventually a Chilean ship stopped by and picked up the old-young man, and he worked his way back to Hawaii. He didn't tell his story—figured no one would believe him. Now? None of his old friends or family had recognized him and he was starting to get old again—he could feel it. So he wanted to go back to Easter Island—was willing, for a consideration plus transportation, to share his secret of eternal youth with Old Man Winster.

That was the story. As it ended, with Frobius' dry voice on an upbeat, as if he had just announced a fat corporate dividend for the year, I opened my mouth to sound off, then shut it. Obviously Winster wasn't going to hire me to tell him that this was just a new angle on an ancient con game, the one that started the day after Adam and Eve gave up their key to the Garden and joined their furniture out on the sidewalk. Anyone could tell him that. He hadn't asked me, so why tell him?

"Well," I said, "that's very interesting." My mind, coming out of a semi-blank "how-can-anyone-be-this-stupid" daze, clicked. Of course they could be that stupid if they tried—and they were trying! What the Old Man needed me for was to save him from this con-man dream and from himself with some hard, businesslike facts. I'd investigate this beach boy, get the proof positive that he really wasn't any older than he looked. Sure. Easy. I knew just how to do it.

I looked around at the three of them—the Old Man and the not-so-young, bouncy blonde and Frobius, the aging boy-wonder. Each had a faraway look—like a pre-television kid lost in a fairy tale or a broken old lush at a liquor store window—that dreamy-lost look into never-never land.

"So!" I spoke out sharply. They jumped and focused back down to my level. "You'll want me to check the beach boy. Right? That I can do. Who is he and where do I find him?"

"Eh? Oh. Oh, yes, of course, Mr. Getz. I have a call in for him to stop by here. He should be along very shortly now."

"Fine," I said, "seventy-five a day." I tried it for size; usually I'm happy with thirty-five and will settle for ten less. The blonde gave me a hard look, then a half smile—I could get along with her. The Old Man nodded dreamily. Frobius looked blank. "Minimum of five hundred for a full, satisfactory report." No squawk. I should be able to handle it in a day or two at the most. This way there'd be no need to drag it along. "And expenses." The Old Man nodded again. He had bought himself an investigation. And I could get him that hard proof he needed to wake him up.

Mission accomplished. Nothing left but to wrap up the details—pin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down the beach boy and make the report. The Old Man grunted himself to his feet and went to look moodily out over the ocean. I winked at the blonde, who gave me another little smile. Frobius came over to be efficient and tell me how to run my business. Somebody knocked on the door.

Frobius blinked his fish-eyes, getting those instructions down in a mental notebook to give me later, and got the door.

There was a good-looking boy there, in sports shirt, jeans, sandals; young—less young at second glance than at first, but still young enough—over thirty, under forty. "Hi, Freddy," I said, "I thought you were dead."

He smiled, bowed politely, and gave me a look that wished I were. "Freddy dead," he said. "Not Freddy; Freddy papa, Moki Kaakau."

I nodded. Very good. Old Moki was Freddy Kaakau's father. It was a smart line and it held the story up. What had happened to old Moki, I had no idea. I had heard, though, that his boy Freddy had been killed in that barge explosion on Kwaj, so it was a bit of a surprise, even though I had been expecting somebody just about like him.

Freddy was a bright boy, a sharpshooter, living on the edge. He gambled some, worked the phony smuggled opium game. I knew him. One of my investigations helped chase Freddy out of town on the Dredging Company job down at Kwaj, a couple of jumps ahead of the law. We weren't on bad terms though, Freddy and I. He knew there was nothing personal in my investigations, just business.

He came in. The others greeted him with hopefully eager warmth and started a storm of questions about Easter Island, the spring, all that. Frobius loosened up to give with a round of drinks. There was a lot of general chatter during which I maneuvered over next to the blonde Miss Drew—Lucille, her name was—and squeezed a word in edgewise and a knee when I got the chance. I got a giggle.

After a bit I made my excuses, turned down another drink, and left. Sure, I could have told them the score on Freddy right then. But would that have been an investigation? Anyway, I couldn't have actually *proved* that he wasn't his own father. I had to investigate.

I started on the beach by catching Paddlewheel Kamoku at his spot in front of the Hotel, waiting for a surfing-lesson customer.

"Freddy Kaakau? I don't know, Herbie. Got one Kaakau, call himself Moki, no? Been come around two, maybe three month."

"Yeah? Calls himself Moki, but looks just like Freddy, right?"

Paddlewheel shrugged heavy, mahogany shoulders. "More better you tell him stay off beach, no?"

"Why?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why? That one pilau beach boy, why." Paddlewheel was peeved.

"Still, why?"

"Look. Other day he catch nice, big, fat blonde. Not so young kind, huh?" His eyes rolled appreciatively. Paddlewheel was no kid and the Hawaiians like women of substance. "Best kind, you know?" The thought had crossed my mind. "But that one, Kaakau, lucky, get this one on surfboard, give lesson. Okay. Then, good, he can give other kind lesson, make nice, make happy, get nice tip, Old Man no worry, no care, nice for everybody, no?"

I nodded.

"But not for this one. He make nice blonde wahine take him to see Old Man. He going to try something, no? This kind not good for beach-boy business."

The Better Business Bureau of the beach. They have their principles, and sound enough, too. "Yeah," I said, "no moral standards, right? But don't worry, or bother to work him over, either. I'll have him off the beach quick enough."

"Greedy." Paddlewheel shook a heavy head in disapproval.

I went back downtown and fussed around a bit getting the fingerprints from the glass, Freddy's, that I'd lifted when I was leaving the suite at the Royale. Got a fair enough set. Took them over to the State Office Building, where I have a friend or two. They have records there. Neither Freddy nor his father had any police records, but during the War everybody in Hawaii got fingerprinted—military security. Those prints are still stored there.

I left the set from the glass with my friend, Furtado; asked him to check for me against Freddy's card and, just for the hell of it, against Moki's. He'd have it for me, "two, three day, okay?"

"Now, Furtado, you remember that nice report I made for you when your wife's mother got me to check your trip to the Kauai convention? Make it tomorrow, huh?"

"Tomorrow? You like, Herbie, for you I make tonight, I think so."

"Tomorrow will be plenty good enough. Mahalo."

It was getting late then. I checked my telephone secretary, locked up the office, and took a little run out to the Kalihi side of town, where the Kaakau family had always lived.

I found the old house, but not much more—not much, that is, except for one of Freddy's sisters and her husband and their swarm of kids, and the husband's parent.

All I got from the sister was, "Papa-san no stop; Mama-san stop cemetery. Freddy no stop too. You go now, no?"

I went. I hadn't gotten any helpful information or, as I had hoped, spotted Freddy's father around. But then, I didn't really need anything there anyway. The fingerprints would be plenty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That was enough for one day on—what should I call it?—the Kid Winster Caper? Anyway, I went on home. I'm a bachelor, but I have a house—the bank and I. I fixed myself a nice sukiyaki supper. Sure I can cook, and damn well too. It's by way of being my hobby—that and eating.

No, nobody took a shot at me all night long. There were no threatening phone calls, no prowlers, no nothing. I slept all night, other than one spell when a neighbor's dog took a notion to yap at a friend up the valley. I dreamed sweetly, and with bounce, of the bouncy, not-too-young blonde, Lucille.

I woke up thinking what a pity it was that my association with her was due to end so soon—with my report to Old Man Winster today. Then I figured: probably Furtado wouldn't have checked out the prints yet. Give him another day. A little beach time would do me good.

I spent a couple of hours on the Hotel Lanai with Miss Lucille Drew. The Old Man didn't mind—hardly gave us a glance—and limped down the beach for a surfboard lesson from Freddy-Moki-Kaakau. Freddy earned his money that afternoon and Paddlewheel Kamoku almost drowned Frobius out of sheer petulance. He had his eye on the bouncy Miss Drew, too, but I didn't let it worry me. No reason the beach boys have to get them all.

The afternoon ended. Freddy hauled the Old Man out of the ocean. He hadn't located any fountain of youth off Waikiki, that was clear.

"Yes, sir," I told him, "About my report, sir, I'll have it for you tomorrow—full, concrete evidence."

"Whuf! Whoo-ho! Not so young as I used to be, hah!" Winster huffed, puffed, and gave me a hard look. "what was that you were saying, Getz?"

"I said I'll have a full report of my investigation for you tomorrow."

"Oh." The Old Man said it flatly, with no enthusiasm I could notice; and I was looking. "Well, that's fine, Getz; and be damned sure of your facts, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

He turned and walked off.

The next afternoon, late, I was back at the Royale. The desk told me Mr. Winster was expecting me, up in his suite. I rode up in the elevator, sweating lightly, my fingerprint report in my pocket.

And what in hell was I going to report? Well, I hadn't decided. Why? Because, fact was, that jerk, Furtado, had jammed me up. His fingerprint record was no good—at least, it hadn't given me what I was looking for—the proof that the young Kaakau really was young Freddy Kaakau.

"No," Furtado told me, "you all wrong, Herbie. These prints not from Freddy Kaakau."

"No?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No, oh, no! There couldn't be anything in that silly story.

"Uh-uh. Not from Moki Kaakau, either; not from any Kaakau."

"Oh, come on, Furtado."

"True fact, I tell you."

"Well, then who the hell did they come from?"

He shrugged. "Not know that." I couldn't blame him really. They don't have any F.B.I. classification set-up there; it isn't so easy to match a set of prints if you don't know where to look. But he must have some idea. "For you, Herbie," he told me, "I stay here and look some more after work. Little later, you call, I tell you something, I think so."

Well, it was nice of him and I thanked him for it. I could call from Winster's suite. But, pending that, what was I going to report?

It was about 5:30 when I knocked on the door and Frobius opened it, no more welcoming than he had been two days before. The full group was there in the living room: the Old Man, Lucille, Freddy, Frobius, me. From Freddy I got a small bow and a slight grin. From Lucille, a questioning smile. From Winster and Frobius, nothing but a matched pair of hard looks.

I decided to paly it for a dramatic scene. "My report," I said in a tough voice, private-eye style, "if you will wait just one minute while I make one final, crucial phone call—"

I walked to the phone. They all sat around glaring at me. It wasn't too comfortable, particularly after I had put in five damned minutes getting a thick-headed series of operators to put a call through to the after-hours number of the Records Division. But I finally got him.

"Furtado?"

"Ah? This you, Herbie?"

"Yeah, yeah, it's me. You have it? The vital information?"

"Huh? Oh, you mean on the prints. Sure, I got him. Herbie, this'll kill you."

"I hope not. Who, dammit?"

"You."

"What?"

"No huhu, Herbie. Those are your prints you gave me. Couldn't be clearer. What? Some kind of gag, no?"

I hung up. Some kind of gag, yeah. I'd let that snake Freddy get away with switching glasses on me!

What could I do now? Bluff? Claim I'd matched Freddy's prints anwyay?

I looked around the room. There was a heavy tension. They were all staring at me, watching, waiting.

Then all at once I felt fine. Why not? Why had Old Man Winster hired me, a chance shot from the Yellow Pages, and him with all his money? Did he pick me because he figured I was good—or bad? He wanted a report sure. But did he want one that would force him to wake up from this silly fountain-of-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

youth dream? Of course not. He wanted something else, and I had just the report he did want.

I turned from the phone and smiled at all of them. "Yes, sir," I said, "my report. I am happy to tell you, sir, that after the most thorough and painstaking investigation, I have been able to find no concrete evidence whatever that would tend to cast doubt on Mr. Kaakau's story."

Big, happy smiles went all around the room. No rude awakening. The Old Man hobbled over to shake my hand. Lucille laughed and hugged me.

But hell—it was an honest report. Suppose you see a baby drooling over a juicy hunk of candy. Maybe it isn't too good for the baby. But, chances are it won't do him much damage either. You could take it away from him, sure, but he'll sure hate you for it if you do, and maybe make himself sicker from crying than from the candy.

Five hundred bucks. You know what? Old Man Winster wrote me a check for five lovely grand.

I don't know what he paid Freddy—I didn't ask and I'm not going to. That's their business.

Yeah, they're still around, down at the yacht harbor. Od Man Winster bought an auxiliary schooner. The *Peter Pan*, Lucille has named it; very cute. They are fitting out to leave in a week or so now, have a local crew of six all signed on, plus Freddy, who says he can cook if they want him too. But I warned them not to trust him.

It is a long trip, all the way down to Easter Island, and they need a really good, dependable cook. "But don't worry," I said, "I have the solution to your problem."

Well, I don't have any pressing investigations right now. A little trip will be good for me—like a vacation. Anyway, I feel I owe it to them to see that they at least eat well on the trip. And there is Lucille—days and nights at sea. I'm not too old for romance yet. Not quite yet. Maybe not for—uh.

All right, so we are a bunch of nuts, all of us. I admit it.

But, dammit, the truth is I don't really know that there *isn't* some sort of peculiar spring down there on the reef off Easter Island, do I? Or that Freddy is really Freddy? Sure, I'm going. I'm an investigator.

CLASSIFIED
Rates: $1.00 Per Word

ATHLETIC EQUIPMENT & BODY BUILDING

FREE—Bigger, stronger, muscle information! Centuck, Station 37, Yonkers 3, New York.

PERSONAL

MEXICAN Legal Matters. A. Espejo, Box 217-M, Tijuana, Mexico.

RARE BOOKS

Out of print mysteries? Our Specialty. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 668, San Diego 12, California.

MYSTERY FICTION. Send for list. JOSEPH KURY, 341 South 13th Street, Philadelphia.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH your book! Join our successful authors: publicity advertising promotion, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for free manuscript report and detailed booklet. Carlton Press, Dept. DGE, 84 Fifth Avenue, New York City 11.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Number 229 in the 21-year history of EQMM's "first stories" . . . Unfortunately, we cannot claim credit for having "discovered" this gripping "first story." The author and his earliest work of fiction were discovered by "Argosy" magazine of London, in which the story appeared last year; but we thought the story fine enough to "import" it from England and give it its first American publication.

Mr. Darrington was born in Norfolk, England, in 1913. He was married in 1939. He served in the Royal Artillery, as a Major in the 8th Army, from 1939 to 1945. For the last seven years he has been a schoolmaster on the Isle of Wright.

Not much of a 'tec tintype, we admit—but enough to glimpse the man whose first published fiction you are now about to read . . .

THE DEVIL INSIDE

by R. F. DARRINGTON

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU walk into a pub and see a man, whom you know to be dead, standing by the bar?

If I'd had any sense I should have turned tail and walked straight out again. Not, I suppose, that that would have been any good. The mere sight of him would have started all the old memories and speculations. The inevitable meeting would only have been postponed. Having seen him, I should have had to try to find out more.

What I actually did was to order my pint and take it to a corner table. It was quite early in the evening and the room was almost empty. I took a long swig and sat back to look at Bill Deecon, the man who had been my best friend, the man I knew to have been killed sixteen years ago.

He'd aged, of course. There's a hell of a difference between twenty-three and thirty-nine. But sixteen years older or not, he was unmistakably Bill. Dark curly hair—graying a bit now. Broken nose. Chin thrust forward in a way which suggested aggressiveness until you noticed that the good-humored mouth denied it. Even the way he leaned on the bar, and held his mug with one large hand underneath it, was a stance that belonged only to Bill.

At this moment, his glance, roving idly round the room, turned on me. I waited to see recognition dawn. It didn't. His eyes rested on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me momentarily, then moved on. If it was Bill, he had schooled himself not to know anyone from the war years—or before—which, considering the circumstances which had preceded his presumed death, was hardly surprising.

I drank some more beer and had second thoughts. Perhaps he genuinely didn't recognize me. It was about a week after he had gone that I had trodden on that damned mine. Considering all things, they had patched me up pretty well, but losing a leg and having scraps of metal distributed about the face presumably changes one's appearance a bit.

His mug was nearly empty. He might leave at any moment. Before he went I had to know.

I finished my beer and walked up to the counter. I stood by his side and asked for a refill. Our eyes met. He smiled—the sort of smile that one gives a stranger in a pub. But it gave me an opening.

"Good evening," I said. "You are Bill Deecon, aren't you?"

He didn't twitch a muscle. Just looked vaguely puzzled and surprised. Absolutely the right reaction to being given the wrong name by a perfect stranger.

"Afraid not," he replied, in Bill's voice. "My name's Whitwell—Harry Whitwell."

I looked at him again. At close quarters the resemblance was more striking than ever. Still, I couldn't accuse him of lying. Perhaps I'd changed more than I thought. Perhaps Bill thought he was denying himself to some comparative stranger from the past. Perhaps a tin leg and facial scars had made me unrecognizable even to Bill, who for years had been closer than a brother.

"Sorry," I said, "but you're exactly like him. I'm Peter Coombs. Have another beer?"

Nothing connected. If the name meant anything to him, he certainly didn't show it.

He had another beer. We chatted as we drank. He told me that he'd just arrived in Easthampton to take up a teaching job in the local school. I told him I was a solicitor. After this sort of small talk he asked about Bill.

I told him that Bill and I had served together in the Desert and in Italy. I didn't tell him about Bill being arrested. I'd never told anyone that story—not even Susan.

He said he often wished he'd been in the Desert. Thought it must have been the best part of the war. He'd kicked his heels in England until the Normandy landings, then he'd gone through France and up into Germany. Yes—he'd been in the Gunners too.

He glanced at his watch, said he must go, offered me another beer which I refused, said good night, and left. His walk as he crossed the room was Bill's, left foot turned out slightly, head back, chin thrust forward.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I sat down again with the remains of my beer and thought about Bill Deecon. I hadn't done this for some years.

Bill and I had first met at school when we were both six. We fought—we both cried—we swore eternal friendship and somehow it stuck.

Bill was always the leader. He was just that little bit more determined—just that little bit more intelligent—just that little bit stronger—than I. We were to go to Cambridge together, but Hitler had other plans and we joined the Army together instead.

We arrived in North Africa in time for Alamein—a couple of very raw subalterns. By the time we'd reached the northern half of Italy, Bill was commanding the Battery and I was his second-in-command. I thought I knew him better than any man on earth, which was why it was such a hell of a shock when it happened.

We were preparing for what turned out to be the last big battle of the Italian campaign. By and large there was a lull and Bill had taken the day off to go back to Ancona. We all went back to Ancona when we could—there were some good public baths there.

It was late afternoon when the C.O. sent for me. Regimental H.Q. wasn't far away and I walked across. The Colonel was a nice old boy—at least he seemed old to me then—and when I walked into the cottage which was serving as his office, I was shaken to see how upset he looked. He had reason to be.

Bill had been arrested—arrested for the particularly brutal and obscene murder of a ten-year-old Italian girl.

When he told me I felt as though a mule had kicked me in the stomach. I began to protest that there must be some mistake. The C.O. stopped me with an abrupt gesture.

"That was my first reaction too, Peter," he said, "but there's no mistake. They took him red-handed." He winced when he realized what he had said.

I remember thinking that I'd never before appreciated the true meaning of the expression.

Even after this interval of time my mind sheered away from the details. I suppose the whole disgusting affair would have had much more publicity but for the lucky accident of the shell hitting the truck which was bringing Bill back that evening.

Lucky? Well, lucky for Bill, for the Regiment, and for Bill's friends. Not so lucky for the poor escort and driver who were killed with him.

When he heard about that, the C.O. summoned me again. He knew, of course, that Bill and I had been very close. He told me that he proposed to send the usual letter to Bill's parents. *Killed in action. Deeply regret. Loss of a gallant officer. Etc.* Then he cleared his throat and looked at me straight.

"I believe he was engaged to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

married," he said. "I expect you know the girl. I suggest that you write to her along similar lines."

He was. I did. I had been in love with Susan as long as Bill had. But if he had not been killed she would never have married me.

I had never for one moment doubted that Bill had been killed that night—never until I had walked into The Chequers this evening.

I bought myself a third pint and settled down to think some more. Susan would be wondering where I was, but I had to sort this out before I faced her.

Suppose Bill had been the sole survivor from the shell which hit the truck. He would know that there was no future for him as Major Bill Deecon. It wouldn't have been difficult at that time to find some Italian peasant's clothes and take to the hills—things were pretty chaotic. Bill had spoken Italian fluently.

But surely, when the remains were gathered up it would have been obvious whether there were two bodies or three. Not necessarily, I argued with myself. Blast played some funny tricks. Three men together. Two could be blown to rags and tatters of flesh and the third escape unharmed. Damn it—in 1940 every other Londoner was telling that sort of bomb story.

All right. So Bill hadn't been killed. What then?

That seemed easy. He had lain low until the war was over. Somehow or other he had got back to England. There was, I believe, a brisk trade in stolen and forged papers throughout the Middle East in those days. It wouldn't have been impossible for a determined and desperate man. I knew Bill was determined and I was certain that he was desperate.

Then he'd taken up a new life as Harry Whitwell—schoolmaster. Doubtless he'd avoided familiar localities. Doubtless if he ever ran into anyone from his old life he'd put on a similar act to the one he'd given me this evening. After all, only a handful of people who'd known him also knew the circumstances of his death. Colonel Knowles—and he was dead. The Adjutant. Me. A couple of chaps in the Military Police. To the others who knew the facts Bill was only a name.

At this point I took hold of myself. Here was I, an experienced solicitor accustomed to dealing in fact, weaving a whole web of fantasy from a chance meeting with a stranger in a pub. Maybe he did resemble Bill. Everyone is said to have a double somewhere. Nobody could be as good an actor as Bill would have had to be not to betray himself to me.

I drained my glass and went home.

I don't walk as fast as I used to. My tin leg works well enough but it's not built for speed. It took me a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quarter of an hour to cover the half mile from The Chequers to my house. During this time I decided that I must tell Susan about Whitwell. After all she might bump into him at any time—he was teaching at the school which my daughters attended—and it would be a hell of a shock if she wasn't prepared.

What with one thing and another I didn't actually tell her until we reached the bedroom. First, I was late for supper. Then there was a play on TV which she wanted to see. Just as that finished, young Caroline had a noisy nightmare and the commotion awakened Pauline. So there was no opportunity for light chitchat until we were preparing for bed.

She was actually in bed lying back on the pillows, and I was sitting on the edge, unstrapping my tin leg, when I told her. All casual-like.

"By the way, darling," I said, "I've been meaning to tell you all evening. I ran into a bloke in the pub who was the absolute double of old Bill. Couldn't believe my eyes at first. Although I knew he wasn't Bill I had to speak to him, just to make sure. Turned out to be a chap named Whitwell—teaches at the girls' school."

Sue didn't answer for a moment. I forced myself not to look at her. She and I were happy together, but I had never doubted that I was second best.

When she did answer her voice was just a shade too casual—exactly as mine had been.

"Really?" she said. "Was he quite like—or very like?"

"Very like," I replied, as I pulled on my pajama trousers. "Not like Bill as he was, but Bill as he would have been now—if you follow me."

I fell back into bed. There was a long silence. Then Sue said good night and I switched out the light.

It had been a trying day at the office, and an even more trying evening. By all the rules I should have been dead-beat. But no sooner was the light extinguished than my thoughts started to tumble over each other again.

The likeness really was extraordinary. Could two men be so exactly similar? And if Whitwell wasn't Bill—well, did he match him inside as well as out? If so, surely he was the last man in the world to be in daily contact with young children.

Memories of Italy in the first part of 1945 surged over me.

When it was over—when the letters had been written and the formalities completed—Colonel Knowles and I had mentioned the matter only once. It was the evening before the Po battle was due to begin. That we both knew. What we didn't know was that before morning the Colonel would be dead and I should be on my way to hospital minus one leg and a great deal of blood.

I'd slipped over to R.H.Q. before

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

starting off for the O.P. The O.P. I never reached—a Shu mine got in the way.

The C.O. poured out a couple of large whiskies. He was silent—unusually so. Suddenly he turned to me with the gesture of a man who has reached a decision.

"I've been wondering whether to tell you or not, Peter," he said, "but, all in all, I think you ought to know. This ghastly business about Bill: I'm afraid it wasn't the first time . . . Apparently the Redcaps have been investigating right up Italy. God only knows if it was happening in Africa as well. Probably not—there weren't a lot of kids knocking about the Desert. But the Major who dealt with Bill's case told me that there were some ugly rumors in Cairo a few years back."

I didn't say anything. There didn't seem anything I could say.

The old man went on. Obviously the thing was on his mind and he wanted to share it with someone. He'd thought a lot of Bill—most people in the Regiment had. The C.O. prided himself, not without justice, on being able to sum people up. Now, here was a case of an officer who was believed by everyone to be not only a first-class soldier, but also a first-class man, turning out to be a perverted maniac.

"It's shaken me, Peter," he said, "shaken me to the core. I feel that I shall never be able to believe in anyone again. I shall always be wondering what particular devil lurks inside the decent bloke that I see."

I still didn't say anything. I was thinking the same thing. Perhaps Knowles was wondering if I had shared Bill's sadistic lust. I swallowed my drink and stood up, made my excuses, and went back to the Battery. As I have said, I never saw Knowles again. Within a few hours I was to end my active military life by putting my foot in the wrong place. I heard, very much later, that during the same night the C.O. took a piece of shrapnel in the forehead and died as he fell.

I wished now, as I had wished then, that he hadn't told me. Bill and I had been very close and I would have preferred to have remembered him as the man I knew who had given way once—perhaps because of the strain of war—to a filthy and bestial impulse. As it was, he had to be a creature who had made a habit of such foulness, a creature who could wash the blood off his hands and come back to laugh and talk with me and his other friends.

Which brought me back to Whitwell. If he *was* Bill, then clearly he should not be allowed to carry on in any job which brought him into contact with girl children. And even if he was not—how deep did the resemblance go? I had heard of a belief that people who resembled each other physically usually possessed similar tastes, beliefs, habits. Similar vices. Was there any founda-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion for this or was it pure theory?

At this point I fell into a troubled sleep . . .

Nothing much happened for the next three days. There was a lot of difficult stuff in the office—my practice was mostly concerned with civil law—and I worked late every evening. I'm afraid I avoided The Chequers.

When I got home on Friday evening, Sue was unusually quiet. Normally, when I was busy she was splendid. She knew that my stump still worried me when I was tired and so she always set herself to take my mind away from business and entertain me with small talk over the evening meal. Small talk was something she was good at. So, when on this occasion she sat in silence, it was obvious there was something wrong.

I'd been married long enough to know that it was no use hurrying her. When she was ready, she would tell me, not before.

She was ready by the time we reached the coffee. The kids were in bed. I moved across to my chair and tried to relax as she handed me my cup. The toes in the foot I hadn't got were hurting like hell.

"I met Harry Whitwell today," she said quietly. "I went to fetch the girls from school and he was in the playground. It's a good thing you warned me, darling. As it was I stood and gaped. Peter, the resemblance is uncanny."

"You spoke to him?" I asked her.

"I had to. First I had to explain why I was standing like a zany, gazing at him. Secondly, I had to hear his voice. He didn't seem to mind. Actually, he remembered his meeting with you, but he'd forgotten your name. We talked for some minutes."

I kept quiet. I thought, Bill or not, he wasn't likely to mind. No man minds being gazed at by a beautiful woman. And Sue is still very beautiful.

"Peter," she went on. Her voice had become very low. "Peter, I suppose there was no doubt that Bill was killed. I mean, you actually saw his body? You never said much about it." She hesitated, then speaking rather quickly, continued, "It isn't possible that he was just wounded badly—badly enough to make him lose his memory?"

I shouldn't have answered her as I did, of course. My only excuse was that my stump was hurting like fifty devils, I was tired and worried, and that I'd never stopped believing, deep down, that Sue had married me out of pity. Never, by word or deed, had she shown it, but I had always felt that her attitude had been, "Bill's gone—nothing really matters, so I'll look after his old pal, Peter, for him."

None of that was any excuse for my chucking the coffee cup across the room, pulling myself to my feet, and snarling, "Of course he was killed! Do you think I invented the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whole thing so that I could marry you? Well, I bloody well didn't, although I know as I've always known that you would never have looked twice at me—even as a whole man, let alone a damned cripple—if Bill had come home."

And with that I stumped out of the house.

I don't know how far I walked that night. I don't even know where I went. My next memory was of finding myself back again, outside my own front door, nearly three hours later. I was no longer angry—just worn out and thoroughly ashamed of myself.

Sue was sitting in the same chair. She'd cleaned up the mess and put on a housecoat. She gave me a little smile.

I stood in the doorway and felt an utter swine.

"I'm sorry, Sue," I said, "I don't know what got into me."

"Its all right, Peter," she replied, "let's forget it, shall we? I expect we're both ready for bed."

And that, for the time being, was that. I fell into bed and slept the sleep of complete exhaustion.

We both slept late next day. Caroline, who is ten and capable, brought us a cup of tea about eight thirty. I never went to the office on Saturday, no matter how busy I was. I needed the week-ends to renew my strength.

Sue took the girls and the car to the shops. I pottered about the house and tried to forget Bill, Whitwell, and my behavior of the previous evening. I wasn't successful.

When they returned Sue was looking disturbed. Oh, God! I thought. Surely she hasn't run into Whitwell again.

She hadn't. What she had run into was news of a murder. A little girl had been brutally killed and maltreated in an alley in the poorer part of the town.

She was apparently the child of worthless parents. They had left her in the charge of a slightly older sister on the previous evening, while they visited the local. Both children had taken advantage of their absence to wander out into the dark streets. There they had separated. The older one had eventually returned home. The younger one would never return.

For some days now I had been a worried man. But these previous doubts and anxieties were as nothing compared with those which now beset me.

A child had been brutally done to death. I knew that in the town there was living the double of a man who had been proved to have committed several identical crimes—if not that man himself. But other than suspicion I knew nothing to connect Whitwell with this murder.

Naturally enough I was acquainted with most of the Easthampton Police Force. They were, as a whole, reliable and reasonably intelligent. But like most policemen they were not given to flights of fancy and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imagination. They would be disinclined to give a sympathetic hearing to a tale of physical resemblance.

Supposing I went to them and said that Whitwell bore a marked likeness to a man who was killed in action, but who, before his death, had been guilty of similar crimes. After all, there was no need to mention Bill's name. But Easthampton is a small town and, as in all small towns, gossip is rife. Sooner or later, the information which I gave was bound to leak out. Sooner or later Sue would hear of it. Then I should be forced to tell her the truth about Bill. Tell her that the man she had loved—the man whose memory she still adored and revered—was a sadistic and perverted murderer.

I argued this out with myself over and over again during that week-end. If only there had been someone with whom I could have talked it over it might have been better. However, since I was smashed up I haven't been much of a social animal. I had dozens of acquaintances in Easthampton, but not one close friend. Sue was the only one. She was the person to whom I had taken all my worries. Now I had a load which I couldn't share with her and I was utterly lost.

The immediate consequence was that I became more and more bad-tempered. As was usual when I was worried, my stump played merry hell. So, all in all, by Sunday evening I wasn't fit to go within a hundred yards of any human.

Sue and the girls kept out of my way as much as possible, but the week-end must have been nearly as intolerable for them as it was for me.

I suppose the explosion had to come sooner or later.

It turned out to be later—after supper on Sunday, to be exact. Once more the kids were in bed. Sue—poor Sue—tried to do it tactfully.

"You've had a bad week-end, darling," she said. "Is it just the leg—or is there something else as well?"

I, of course, was as touchy as nitroglycerine.

"Just the leg!" I growled. "It's all very well for you to say *just* the leg. You don't have it to put up with all the time, don't have to endure hobbling about with everyone feeling sorry for you. Or perhaps you do. You are as deserving of sympathy as I am. It can't be any fun being tied to a cripple whom you married on the rebound and out of pity."

Sue's patience snapped at last.

"Peter, don't be such a fool." She was sitting upright in her chair. "It's high time you rid yourself of all this nonsense. Can you possibly imagine, after all these years, that I don't love you? It's more than time, too, that you gave up this self-pity you indulge yourself with. Other men have lost limbs and worse—"

As on the earlier evening my self-control went with a bang. I pulled myself to my feet and again

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stumped out of the room. Only my exit line was different.

This time I shouted that if she felt like that I'd take myself away.

Again I wandered out into the darkness and walked—and walked—and walked. But this time I didn't find myself back at my own front door.

This time I came out of my blackout to find a torch being shone in my eyes and to hear a gruff voice say, "It's Mr. Coombs!"

Another voice behind the light replied, "Whoever it is he'll have to give a full account of his movements. Two kids in three nights is over the odds."

Memory—horror—fear—they all leaped into my mind like demons.

"Another?" I groaned. "Dear God—not another."

"I'm afraid we shall have to ask you to come along to the station, Mr. Coombs. We're checking everyone who's out tonight. We won't keep you long; we shall just want a statement saying where you've been for the past two hours."

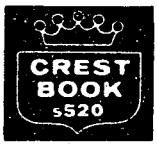
Which is, of course, exactly what I couldn't give them. I had flung out of the house soon after eight thirty. I had been picked up about ten o'clock. The second child's body had been found just after nine. Apparently she had only just died.

When I couldn't give any coherent description of how I had spent the evening, Inspector Barton turned his attention back to Friday. The fact that I couldn't say how that evening had been spent either seemed to clinch the matter.

All the evidence is circumstantial, of course. They haven't actually charged me yet—but they put me in hospital and a policeman is never far from me.

The hell is that even I don't know if I am guilty. Did I, crazy with worry, wander into the streets and, with my mind full of Bill, copy his crimes? Or was it Bill himself, masquerading as Whitwell, driven on by his evil genius? Or was Whitwell truly the man he claimed to be, but carrying Bill's inward devil with his outward appearance?

The real hell is that I will never know . . .



Wherever Paperbacks Are Sold

CAPE FEAR

(formerly: The Executioners)

by John D. MacDonald

Crest s520 ONLY 35¢

"A powerful and frightening story."
—Anthony Boucher

Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Conn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

50 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES

NOW ONLY $5.95

IF MYSTERY IS YOUR OYSTER, FEAST ON 50 BEST SELLERS!

1220	Murder on Delivery, Spencer Dean
6038	Murder on My Street, Edwin Lanham
1256	Never Kill a Cop, Lee Costigan
C•316	Odds Against Tomorrow, William P. McGivern
2846	Pick-Up on Noon Street, Raymond Chandler
6000	Mark Kilby and the Secret Syndicate, Robert Caine Frazer
6048	Price Tag For Murder, Spencer Dean
1118	Queen's Bureau of Investigation, Ellery Queen
1262	Reason For Murder, Jack Usher
6004	Señor Saint, Leslie Charteris
1274	So Dead the Rose, M. E. Chaber
1233	Thanks to the Saint, Leslie Charteris
2823	Trouble Is My Business, Raymond Chandler
M•3122	The Velvet Ape, David C. Holmes
M•4205	The Watcher, Dolores Hitchens
6021	The Way Some People Die, John Ross Macdonald
M•4145	The Widow's Tale, John Coates

OFFER GOOD UNTIL SEPT. 1, 1962

May 1962

MYSTERY POCKET CLUB
230 West 17th Street (8th floor)
New York 11, N. Y.

I enclose_____($5.95 for each set of 50 books) which will be sent to me prepaid. (Please send check or money order.) I understand that if I am not completely satisfied, I may return my books within 14 days for a complete refund.

NAME_____

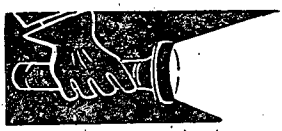
STREET_____

CITY_____ZONE_____

STATE_____

2088	The ABC Murders, Agatha Christie
6024	Beware The Curves, A. A. Fair
C•392	The Big Bankroll, Leo Katcher
6006	The Big Blackout, Don Tracy
M•3089	The Brave, Bad Girls, Thomas B. Dewey
1231	The Broken Angel, Floyd Mahannah
1252	Cairo Intrigue, William Manchester
6029	Call Girls For Murder, John B. Ethan
6052	Cat Among The Pigeons, Agatha Christie
M•3055	The Con Man, Ed McBain
6033	The Defense Does Not Rest, Edna Sherry
2270	The Devil to Pay, Ellery Queen
1248	Dishonor Among Thieves, Spencer Dean
C•397	Easy to Kill, Agatha Christie
M•3076	Ellery Queen's Awards: Tenth Series, Ellery Queen
1230	End of the Line, Bert and Dolores Hitchens
6031	The Girl's Number Doesn't Answer, Talmage Powell
1223	The Gracious Lily Affair, F. van Wyck Mason
6064	The Hollywood Hoax, Robert Caine Frazer
1250	The Killer Is Mine, Talmage Powell
6075	Killer On The Turnpike, William P. McGivern
M•3108	Killer's Choice, Ed McBain
6047	The King Is Dead, Ellery Queen
6059	The Lady in Cement, Anthony Rome
M•4200	The Maltese Falcon, Dashiell Hammett
M•3113	Killer's Payoff, Ed McBain
C•396	They Came to Baghdad, Agatha Christie
6022	Mark Kilby and the Miami Mob, Robert Caine Frazer
6030	Marked For Murder, John Ross Macdonald
1277	The Merchant of Murder, Spencer Dean
2680	The Moving Target, John Ross Macdonald
1261	Mark Kilby Solves a Murder, Robert Caine Frazer
1206	The Murder of the Missing Link, Vercors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Q. Patrick was the only writer to win prizes in *all* of the first 7 EQMM contests; now he has gathered these 7 stories, plus 4 others and a novella, into book form as THE ORDEAL OF MRS. SNOW, by his alter ego Patrick Quentin (Random, $3.50). Many entries may be familiar from frequent anthologization; but the deft plotting, the quiet psychological probing, the suavely ironic writing, all combine to make a strikingly notable book of shorts, surely deserving inclusion in Queen's Quorum.

★★★★★ **A SECOND COMPANION TO MURDER, by E. Spencer Shew** (Knopf, $4.50)
With this and Shew's first COMPANION (Knopf, 1961), you have a complete survey of significant British murders 1900-1950, written with wit, taste, insight, accuracy and extraordinary conciseness.

★★★★ **THE CHINESE LAKE MURDERS; THE HAUNTED MONASTERY, by Robert van Gulik** (Harper, $3.95; Lounz, $2.50)
Two more in the inexhaustibly wonderful series of puzzles for Judge Dee (630-700 A.D.)—elaborately intricate detective stories rich in details of ancient Chinese life and justice.

★★★★ **UNDER THE SKIN, by Dorothea Bennett** (Mill-Morrow, $3.50)
Hitchcockian thriller of assassination in a Swiss ski resort, vividly and perceptively written.

★★★★ **361, by Donald E. Westlake** (Random, $3.50)
Harsh shocker of violence and retribution, firmly understated in the best Hammett tradition.

★★★ **DEATH OF A RACEHORSE, by John Creasey** (Scribner's, $2.95)
Murder of a probable Derby winner furnishes Superintendent West with one of the best cases in his long and admirable career.

Three fine omnibuses (3 novels each) commend themselves to every library: Agatha Christie's MAKE MINE MURDER! (1932-40; Dodd, Mead, $4.50), Ngaio Marsh's ANOTHER THREE-ACT SPECIAL (1955-60; Little, Brown, $4.95) and especially Ellery Queen's THE BIZARRE MURDERS (1933-35; Lippincott, $4.95).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a new story by

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Message in a Bottle

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	PHYLLIS BENTLEY
TITLE:	*Message in a Bottle*
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Miss Phipps
LOCALE:	Brittlesea, England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Miss Phipps becomes deeply involved in a classically romantic situation in which the happiness of a child and the famous Southshire emeralds tug at her curiosities.*

Miss Phipps, with Dective-Inspector Tarrant's wife Mary and the Tarrants' small son Johnny, emerged from the lane onto the narrow Rylan Bay beach. Johnny, smartly clad in a jodhpur suit of white wool brightened by a canary-colored sweater, trotted along holding Miss Phipps's hand; his fair hair blew in the breeze, his cheeks were rosy. Mary was carrying the picnic basket; Miss Phipps, who was paying her annual summer visit to the Tarrants, bore a rug.

The sea came into view.

"Ohohohohoh!" cried Johnny joyously. He snatched his hand from Miss Phipps's and plunged down the beach.

Miss Phipps dropped the rug and ran after him, for the shore was so haphazardly covered with rocks, sand, and pebbles that it seemed impossible for those small eager feet to reach the water's edge without a stumble. Sure enough, Johnny tripped at the high-water mark, where seaweed and jellyfish and strips of rotting wood lay entangled, the flotsam and jetsam of the tide. He fell and sprawled, scrambled up manfully, then stood with flushed face regarding his hands and knees, now encrusted with seaweed, distastefully.

"Oh, what a shame," said Miss Phipps in a consoling tone, brushing him down.

LICENSED TO NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Johnny gave her a glance of severe reproach, and the corners of his mouth turned down. He was deciding to cry.

"Look, Johnny!" said Miss Phipps hastily, pointing. "There's a bottle floating in the sea!"

Johnny forgot about crying, and stretching out his hand imperiously, demanded, "Bottle!"

Thus committed, Miss Phipps, aiming pebbles rather skillfully, drove the bottle near the shore. In this long narrow cliff-bound bay the water was deep and the tide came in vigorous and splashing; Miss Phipps became damper than was altogether suitable to her dignity as a best-selling novelist before she at last clasped the bottle in her arms. Laughing, and not really minding the amused glances of the other holiday-makers—the beach was crowded with families who had come, like the Tarrants, on the afternoon bus from the neighboring seaside resort of Brittlesea—she took Johnny's hand and ran along to Mary.

The rug was already spread, the basket opened. Johnny lost interest in the bottle and rooted for the chocolate biscuits.

"Look, Mary!" cried Miss Phipps triumphantly.

"Is there a message from a shipwrecked mariner in it?" said Mary, smiling.

"Well, oddly enough—believe it or not!—there *is*," said Miss Phipps. "There's a piece of paper inside, anyway."

She wrestled with the swollen cork, got it out at last, and tried to extract the piece of paper which lay curled inside. But the paper adhered damply to the sides of the bottle.

"I need some kind of implement or other," murmured Miss Phipps, looking about for help.

Just above the tidemark of the once remote little bay stood two old fishermen's cottages, thatched and whitewashed, which had been converted by modern enterprise into a store-cum-café for visitors' entertainment. *KELLY'S RYLAN BAY CAFE—Teas and refreshments—Lobsters For Sale*—was freshly painted across its wall in brilliant blue. Miss Phipps scrambled up and went toward the little building.

A tall, large man in his shirtsleeves, with thick graying hair and the wreck of a handsome face, overtook her and strode round the side of the café. He held a bucketful of blue-black squirming lobsters in each hand. His glance swept Miss Phipps's plump form—perhaps a little plumper than usual in her flowered summer frock—with sardonic amusement; his fine gray eyes, Miss Phipps noticed, had a harassed, angry look.

Glancing over her shoulder, Miss Phipps saw a white rowboat pulled up on the shore, its stern still partly afloat in the waves; clearly the man with the lobsters, who was probably Kelly, had just arrived in it.

Miss Phipps went into the café,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

passed between the clustered tables where passengers from the bus were partaking of tea or ice cream according to age and taste, entered the store part of the establishment and approached the counter. Here lolled half a dozen customers of various ages.

A pleasant-looking young man, fair and stocky, ostensibly examining a stand crammed with picture postcards, was glancing shyly at the girl behind the counter, who was quite beautiful. At least, decided Miss Phipps, she would have been beautiful if one could have seen her face through the make-up. Her silvery blonde hair, her huge long-lashed gray eyes, her oval face, were all highly agreeable in spite of the overdone artifice of green eye-shadow and mauve lipstick.

"Excuse me," said Miss Phipps. "Have you a long pin of any kind —an old-fashioned hatpin would do—to poke out the paper from this bottle?"

"No," said the blonde flatly.

"A hairpin might do."

"We haven't any hairpins."

"Or a knitting needle."

"We haven't any knitting needles," said the blonde, whose beautiful face was now contorted by a scowl.

"What about a pencil?"

The presence of pencils could not be denied, as cards full of them, in many bright colors, were propped against toy boats, buckets, spades, and shells on the counter.

"These are a shilling," said the blonde, proffering a card.

"You've some cheaper ones over there, Maureen," said a pleasant cockney voice in Miss Phipps's ear, and a pointing finger came over her shoulder.

Miss Phipps bought a threepenny pencil and tried to poke out the piece of paper, but without success; it clung stubbornly to the inside and would not be dislodged. The owner of the cockney voice, who proved to be the fair young man, then tried his hand, also without success. So did several other customers, till there was quite a hubbub round Miss Phipps.

Suddenly a huge deep bellow boomed, "Shut up! *I'm* speaking."

Astonished, everyone turned and gaped. The man whom Miss Phipps had seen carrying the lobster buckets stood there, his face crimson with rage. With his great height, his massive shoulders, and his flashing eyes, he awed the crowd into silence.

"What's going on here, Maureen?" he demanded angrily.

"It's just this lady trying to get a piece of paper out of a bottle, Grandpa," said Maureen.

Her voice was timid; it struck Miss Phipps that she was really afraid.

"Give it to me," commanded Kelly, stretching out his hand for the bottle.

Miss Phipps laid it in his powerful hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It just came in from the sea," she said weakly.

"Everything for miles round comes in here," said the man. "The currents bring everything in. You just want to put a spoonful of water in the bottle—"

He strode out of the café, Miss Phipps and the customers trailing after him. He made for a rock pool, dipped in the neck of the bottle, swirled the water round inside, put in a finger, and withdrew the floating paper.

"There you are," he said impatiently, handing the paper to Miss Phipps. "I hope it does you some good. It'll be back here next tide." With a powerful gesture he threw the bottle far out to sea, and strode away.

The paper was a half sheet from a pocket-size engagement diary. It had been torn from the bottom half of a page, and therefore the names of the month and year were not visible, but *2 Wednesday (245-120)* defined the date and day of the week. In the space below *2 Wednesday* was written in pencil, in the large careful capitals of someone writing under difficult conditions, an address: *6 Hill Road, Brittlesea.*

The final letters of the last word were a trifle blurred by sea water, but the name was unmistakable, and Miss Phipps felt a childish pang of disappointment. There was no mystery in her cherished bottle, only a Brittlesea picnicker's joke.

"I'm sorry you're so disappointed, Aunt Marian," said Mary Tarrant. (Miss Phipps had been promoted to this rank in the Tarrant family since the birth of Johnny, who was her godson.)

Mary's voice held a trifle of amusement, and Miss Phipps quickly explained: "I was hoping to find a plot for a detective story."

"Oh, I see," said Mary with respect—the sales of Miss Phipps's detective novels were not to be sneezed at. "Can't you manage to make something out of it?"

"I don't see how," said Miss Phipps dolefully.

She turned the half sheet over, and read in pencil on the other side:

HELP ME

"The first thing," said Miss Phipps eagerly to Detective-Inspector Tarrant that evening, "is to ascertain the date when it was written."

"I see no way of doing that," replied Tarrant crossly. "The page belongs, as you can see at once if you subtract 120 from 365 and count back, to the month of September."

"Obviously," agreed Miss Phipps, who had not previously seen this at all.

"As regards the year," continued Tarrant, ruffling the pages of his own engagement diary and doing a few rapid mental calculations, "September 2nd was a Wednesday last year, 1959. Before that—let's see—allowing for Leap Years—Septem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ber 2nd was a Wednesday in 1953."

"The pencil writing looks too fresh for 1953," put in Mary.

"Yes. It was probably written last year or this year, don't you think?" said Miss Phipps in a pleading tone.

"What of it?" said Tarrant, his voice still cross.

"The writer," said Miss Phipps, pink but persistent, "may be living at 6 Hill Road, Brittlesea, perhaps kept in restraint, in dire need of help."

"Then why didn't he apply to the police? Why—and indeed how—could such a person throw a bottle into the sea? Hill Road is a good ten minutes' walk from the shore."

The telephone rang and Tarrant hurried off to answer it.

"Don't take any notice of his bad temper, Aunt Marian," said Mary. "He's very worried at present about a big burglary case. Emeralds stolen from Lord Southshire. It happened the week before you came to Brittlesea, but the police have made no progress yet. So John's not quite himself, you see."

"My dear," said Miss Phipps gravely. "Everything John says is completely sensible and well-founded. The whole thing is probably just a picnicker's joke. Nevertheless, because there is just a remote chance that it is not so, I should feel myself lacking in humanity if I did not make myself acquainted with the people who live at 6 Hill Road."

The door was opened by a quietly handsome woman in her early thirties, dark, slender, and admirably dressed. Holding her hand was a merry little girl with large bright brown eyes, who danced up and down with great enjoyment and beamed at Miss Phipps. The resemblance between the merry face and the quiet one was strong; they were surely mother and child.

"Number 6 Hill Road?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Hesseldine?" said Miss Phipps, who had made inquiries.

"Yes." There was reserve in the reply.

"I've called to ask you a few questions," began Miss Phipps.

She broke off, startled; the look of alarm which sprang to Mrs. Hesseldine's fine eyes was so vivid, her sudden pallor so complete. She has something to conceal, thought Miss Phipps. Her interest quickened.

"It's just this questionnaire," resumed Miss Phipps with an apologetic smile, producing some sheets with mimeographed headings with which she had provided herself. "About the new traffic arrangements in Brittlesea."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Hesseldine. She gave a quick sigh of relief, then smiled. The smile lighted up her face and made her look warm-hearted and friendly. "It's probably my mother-in-law you want—Mrs. Robert Hesseldine. She is the householder here. I'm Mrs. Philip Hesseldine—my husband and I are just living with his widowed mother

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

till we can find a house. I'll fetch her."

She hesitated, however, obviously not quite certain whether to invite Miss Phipps into the house.

"I should like to have your opinion too, if I may. This is not an official survey, you understand—just an unofficial investigation by a private group who desire an entirely impartial opinion," babbled Miss Phipps. "The new arrangement of one-way streets and pedestrian crossings, the diversion of the through traffic, and so on."

"You should see my husband on that point," said Mrs. Hesseldine. "He says that the street beside the library has become a perfect deathtrap in the last few years. He is the Chief Librarian of Brittlesea, as you know."

"Of course," lied Miss Phipps affably. "That is just the kind of impartial reaction my group is seeking."

"Do come in. Vicky, take the lady into the front room—I'll go and fetch Grannie."

Vicky took Miss Phipps's hand and led her into a pleasant bay-windowed room, with books and newspapers lying about, and a distant glimpse of the sea. A piece of sewing hastily thrown down on a settee, and a disheveled doll with some toys and papers strewing a larger table, showed that Mrs. Hesseldine and Vicky had been sitting here when Miss Phipps rang the bell. Miss Phipps sat down on the settee.

"Can you draw?" inquired Vicky.

"Not very well," confessed Miss Phipps.

"Could you draw a dog for me?"

"I hardly think so. I might manage a cat in a sitting position."

"I can draw a cat myself, thank you," said Vicky, shaking her head in polite refusal. "What else could you draw?"

"I might try a daisy?" suggested Miss Phipps after some thought.

"A daisy, a daisy!" cried Vicky gleefully.

She bounded away, and bounded back with an old drawing book and a handful of pencils which she thrust on her guest. To the best of her ability Miss Phipps proceeded to draw a daisy. From the artistic point of view it was not a first-class daisy. Vicky viewed it doubtfully, then brightened.

"I'll just print *daisy* below, and then everybody will know what it's meant for," she said, suiting the action to the word.

"She's a darling child," thought Miss Phipps. "I hope to goodness that whatever is wrong here does not concern her. I am glad I came."

"I hope Vicky hasn't been troublesome," said Vicky's mother, advancing into the room accompanied by an older woman.

"Not in the least," replied Miss Phipps, rising.

Introductions were effected. Miss Phipps volunteered her surname. Mrs. Robert Hesseldine was a sturdy, comely woman in the sixties,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her manner brisk, firm, emphatic, but not unkind. It struck Miss Phipps that she was a woman accustomed to authority; she had been a hospital Sister, perhaps.

"Jancis tells me you're taking a poll about traffic problems in Brittlesea," she boomed.

"Not quite a poll. A questionnaire," murmured Jancis.

"Same thing. Time, too. My husband—he was surgeon here all his life, you know—would have been horrified by the rise in casualties. What about Vicky's road to school, Jancis?" said Mrs. Hesseldine.

"Vicky and I have lived only a few months in Brittlesea, so I imagine our opinions are not of great value," said Jancis in her quiet tones.

Vicky is not Philip Hesseldine's child then, guessed Miss Phipps.

"Our first consideration must be safety," said Mrs. Robert Hesseldine. "If you had ever taken charge of a casualty ward, as I have, Miss Phipps, you would agree."

"I agree with all my heart," said Miss Phipps, privately preening herself on the accuracy of her deduction.

The talk grew friendly. Tea was proposed. While Jancis went to prepare it, Vicky under the elder Mrs. Hesseldine's directions placed a small table for the convenience of the guest. The table belonged to a nest of three, and Vicky, who had enjoyed the duty of placing it, took up another and looked around.

"Will you have a table as well as Miss Pipps, Grannie?" she said eagerly.

There was a pause—a very slight pause, but long enough for Miss Phipps to see in her hostess's eyes a look of pain, heartache, and fear—before Mrs. Robert Hesseldine replied in her hearty tones. "Yes, Vicky. Put it here."

Oh, dear, thought Miss Phipps sadly. I'm afraid whatever is wrong here *does* concern little Vicky. It was the word *Grannie* which obviously upset the senior Mrs. Hesseldine. Vicky is not her granddaugher by birth, but surely she does not resent the child calling her so? The junior Mrs. Hesseldine had been frightened at the thought of being asked questions, before she had been told what the questions concerned.

Yes, there is something wrong here. But what? And which woman wrote *Help me?* And why?

"Money?" wrote Miss Phipps in her notebook as she and Mary sat waiting for Inspector Tarrant to come in to supper. "Cruelty?"

The Brittlesea Central Library, as became that opulent seaside resort, was an impressive building, large, new, and admirably staffed. Miss Phipps, inquiring for Mr. Philip Hesseldine to aid her on a point of research, was at first gently and politely but firmly put off by ascending grades of library assistants, who endeavored to ascertain her errand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and deal with it themselves. But the moment she declared specifically her requirements, pretending that she needed information on the coastline between Brittlesea and Rylan Bay, she was whisked immediately through private doors and into the Chief Librarian's presence.

Philip Hesseldine, thought Miss Phipps approvingly, was exactly the husband she would have chosen for Jancis. Tall and slight, with fine slender hands, gray eyes, and smooth mouse-colored hair, his long intelligent face was at once refined, judicious, and distinguished —it had the look of a man who had suffered much, yet kept his ideals and his self-discipline intact throughout.

"But surely you are Miss Marian Phipps, the detective novelist?" he said in surprise.

Miss Phipps at once threw aside her cloak of silliness and became herself.

"Yes. I'm ashamed to trouble you with my small query, but I need the information for a story I am writing. Absolute accuracy, as you know, is essential."

"It will be a pleasure to assist you," said Philip Hesseldine courteously, placing her in a comfortable armchair.

"I am interested in the workings of the sea tides and currents round Rylan Bay," Miss Phipps invented rapidly. "Flotsam and jetsam and that kind of thing."

She observed him keenly as she spoke. He did not look in the least uneasy or as if the fate of a floating bottle concerned him.

"I don't know that we have anything on those lines," he said thoughtfully. "It is true that the set of the tides towards Rylan Bay is rather remarkably strong, owing probably to the curious Warren structure—"

"Ah, the Warren structure," said Miss Phipps, keeping her end up strenuously. "That interests me greatly. How exactly would you describe it?"

"It's an ancient landslide—a kind of cup between two headlands, seamed with caves and chasms. But as to the tides, I don't think they have gained any widespread literary notice. Would official mariners' charts be helpful. Is it just the Rylan Bay area? Or the Warren?"

"Well—all the coast between Brittlesea and Rylan," said Miss Phipps.

A keener interest showed in Philip Hesseldine's eyes.

"Perhaps a book dealing with the topography of the Southshire coast might be useful?"

"Possibly," agreed Miss Phipps.

"If you will give me your address, I will instruct my staff to find some suitable books and notify you."

"I am staying with Detective-Inspector Tarrant," explained Miss Phipps.

Philip Hesseldine appeared a trifle puzzled. He wrote down the address in a firm beautiful calligraphy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the modern style—much more literate, observed Miss Phipps, than the bottle-note handwriting.

"My staff shall notify you," he said, rising.

Miss Phipps rose too, and turning with a certain deliberate vagueness, found herself in front of a photograph frame of light plain wood, standing on the Chief Librarian's desk. It held a very charming study of Jancis and little Vicky, looking at a book together.

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Phipps in a gushing tone which even to her own ears rang false. "Are you by any chance—that is, you must be—Mr. Philip Hesseldine who lives at 6 Hill Road?"

"Yes," said Philip Hesseldine coldly.

"I was there yesterday afternoon," babbled Miss Phipps with a gesture toward the photograph, "and met your wife and mother."

"Yes," said Philip Hesseldine.

"And little Vicky, of course. What a sweet girl!"

Philip Hesseldine looked straight into Miss Phipps's eyes and stated in an icy tone, "My stepdaughter. I intend to adopt her."

"A very good idea, I'm sure," approved Miss Phipps heartily.

Yes, he too has something to conceal, and Vicky is at the center of it, thought Miss Phipps as an assistant came in response to a touch on a bell and led her away.

"What a charming photograph of Mrs. Hesseldine that is on the Librarian's desk!" gushed Miss Phipps to the young assistant. "A very good likeness!"

"Yes. She's always very elegant," said the girl admiringly. "She lived in London—Mr. Hesseldine met her while he was working for a time in a library there, you know."

Miss Phipps sighed as she bade farewell and moved out into the sunshine through the handsome library portico.

"I'm not an inch farther with my investigation," she reflected. "No, no, that's not true," she replied to herself staunchly. "I have achieved some certainties and some eliminations. All three Hesseldines have something to conceal, and this something probably concerns Vicky. Philip is not the kind of man to write a *help me* note. He is not affected by the mention of sea tides, but he responds when the coastline is brought up. Odd. We narrow the authorship of the note down, therefore, to Mrs. Hesseldine senior or Jancis. On the whole, I incline to Jancis. She looks as if she had been through a good deal. But against whom could she need help? Her mother-in-law? Why? Her husband?"

Miss Phipps snorted angrily. Few men looked less dangerous than the honorable and intelligent Philip, who wished to adopt Vicky. Was one of them being blackmailed? Had Vicky some money which the Hesseldine were trying to lay their hands on?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, bother the Hesseldines," said Detective-Inspector Tarrant angrily. "I really must request you, Aunt Marian, and in the strongest terms, not to busy yourself about this absurd Hesseldine story any longer. The whole thing is a mare's-nest and not of the slightest importance."

"Four people's happiness perhaps," murmured Miss Phipps.

"It is no concern of yours."

"A child's happiness is everyone's concern."

"You are known to be connected with me, and you go about poking your nose into people's private affairs, making your way into their houses under false pretenses, invading their professional premises—"

"Oh?" said Miss Phipps. "How did you know that?"

"Philip Hesseldine telephoned me, of course."

"Really!" said Miss Phipps, astonished. "Why?"

"Do try to show some sense!" shouted Tarrant.

"John," murmured Mary.

"It's all very well, Mary," said her husband irritably, "but here is the whole town in a state of tension, and—"

"*You* are surely in a state of tension, John," said Mary mildly.

Why is the whole town in a state of tension?" asked Miss Phipps. "Wouldn't it be better if you told me all about this Southshire emeralds affair? The Hesseldine business might be mixed up with it.

"Rubbish," said Tarrant rudely.

"Will you tell me, or must I go to the library and read it all up in back issues of the *Brittlesea Herald?"* demanded Miss Phipps.

"For heavens' sake don't go near the library again!" cried Tarrant.

His distress was so real that Miss Phipps was mollified. She sat down and said in a serious, reasonable tone, "John, please tell me the details of the emerald mystery."

"There's no mystery about it—that's the trouble," said Tarrant gruffly. He propped himself on the corner of the table and swung one long leg. "A ducal cousin of Lord Southshire is shortly getting married in Scotland with a good deal of ceremony—balls, dinner parties, that sort of thing. Lady Southshire naturally wishes to wear the famous Southshire emeralds. Lord Southshire brought them down from London—"

"They were stolen near the Library?"

"No. Please don't interrupt, Aunt Marion. Lord Southshire, back in his study, which is in one of the newer wings of the Brittle Keep building, opened the case and looked at the emeralds. The setting of one stone seemed to him a trifle insecure. He went into the next room to fetch a magnifying glass, intending to give the setting a closer examination. He was absent only a minute or two at the outside. When he returned the emeralds were gone."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Any suspects?" murmured Miss Phipps.

"The thief was perfectly obvious," said Tarrant. "Window cleaners were busy on the Keep windows at the time. One man was occupying a ladder at the next window, invisible to Lord Southshire when he left the room. Obviously, this cleaner moved the ladder to the study window, saw the emeralds, was tempted—Lord Southshire's desk stands beside the window—and stole them."

"Window cleaners!" exclaimed Miss Phipps in amazement. "You mean a commercial firm of window cleaners, from Brittlesea?" Tarrant nodded. "You mean the Earl of Southshire has his windows cleaned by an outside firm, not by his own staff?" Tarrant nodded again. "I gather," said Miss Phipps drily, "that the Earl of Southshire belongs to the new poor."

"Quite right," said Tarrant. "A lot of death duties during the last war."

"How valuable were the emeralds?"

"As such things go, not tremendously. Still, they had diamonds between the stones. Quite a number of thousand pounds," said Tarrant cautiously. "Unique historical setting. Family associations. Huge sentimental value."

"Insured?"

"Of course."

"Then, John dear," said Miss Phipps soothingly, "why worry so much about their recovery? Surely to the Southshires nowadays the insurance money would be infinitely more useful than the jewels?"

"But that's just the point!" shouted Tarrant. "The insurance company hasn't said openly that Lord Southshire disposed of them himself in order to get the cash, but it's clear they're suspicious. They're offering a reward and sending an investigator."

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Phipps. "I see."

"Brittle Keep has a good system of burglar-alarm bells," went on Tarrant more calmly. "Lord Southshire pressed the bell, the alarm sounded, the courtyard gates were immediately closed, police cars rushed up the hill. Two window cleaners were inside the courtyard, but they are irrelevant—they were too far from the study and under observation at the time. Two more were outside. One of these was quite a distance from the study, round the other side of the castle. One was near the study, as I told you. We questioned him. He denies seeing the emeralds. We questioned everybody. They all offered to be searched. We searched them. We searched the whole castle. It's perfectly clear to me," concluded Tarrant, "that this window cleaner snatched the emeralds through the window, then when he found the police so promptly on the spot, he got rid of them, hid them somewhere. But where?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What sort of a man is the window cleaner?" asked Miss Phipps.

"My dear Aunt Marian," said Tarrant. "Believe it or not, he's your old friend Slippy Simthwaite. You remember the Star Isle College case? He finished his prison sentence for that little episode a month or two ago. The other window cleaners are angry with him for involving them. He took those emeralds, I'm sure of it," said Tarrant, rising and pacing the room impatiently. "I can see it in his eye. But he hasn't them in his possession now—I'm also sure of that. There's a sort of cocky impertinence in his manner—he may be speaking the truth when he says he doesn't even know where they are. 'I'm as sorry as you are about it, Inspector,' he said to me. 'I'd help you if I could, upon my word I would.' We can't hold him for anything, of course."

"Most people think he just dropped them over the edge of the cliff into the sea," suggested Mary.

"The sea?" exclaimed Miss Phipps, startled. "Where is Brittle Keep?"

"Really, Aunt Marian!" bellowed Tarrant.

"It's that massive old Norman castle on the cliff to the west of Brittlesea Bay," said Mary hastily.

"Oh, dear," said Miss Phipps. "Do you really think—"

"It's highly probable. The cliff path is only a few yards away from the Keeps walls at that point," said Tarrant. "And then you, Aunt Marian, go to the Brittlesea Public Library and ask for books about the Southshire coastline!"

"I'm sorry, John," said Miss Phipps meekly. "If I'd known all this before, of course, I wouldn't have done so."

Tarrant growled and continued to pace.

"What kind of man is Lord Southshire?" inquired Miss Phipps. "Elderly fuddy-duddy?"

"Certainly not. He's a man of my own age. Went through the war in the 4th Southshires. Burma. Prissoner of war. Health severely damaged by privations. Recovered now. Recently married a very nice girl who adores him. No children yet."

"I gather," said Miss Phipps drily, "that you too went through the war in the 4th Southshires."

"I did. And therefore I shall be very much obliged, Aunt Marian," said Tarrant emphatically, "if you will kindly lay off all detective work in Brittlesea for the time being. Your activities are embarrassing to me."

"Emeralds," said Miss Phipps, "are as nothing compared with a child's possible unhappiness."

"I agree, I agree!" said Tarrant impatiently. "But what about Lord Southshire's unhappiness? He's a right to justice, you know, even if he is an earl. By these foolish activities you are confusing the issue, Aunt Marian, muddying the waters, directing suspicion where it cannot possibly lie. Besides, all this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hesseldine business is nonsense—you've nothing at all to go on. You just like to preen yourself on your powers of observation and deduction. It's simple vanity on your part."

"John!" exclaimed Mary.

"I'm sorry," said Tarrant. "But this business is getting me down."

A subdued Miss Phipps was wheeling young Johnny Tarrant down the ramp to the Brittlesea beach in his push-chair, leaving Mary free to do some shopping. Johnny, who thought the push-chair childish and wished to walk, was silent, pouting.

"Oh, there's Miss Pipps with a little boy!" cried Vicky, dancing up suddenly from the crowded beach. "What's your name, little boy?"

Johnny, as susceptible as most males to flattery, remained silent but surveyed her with some approval.

"My name's Vicky. What's your name?"

After protracted consideration Johnny made his decision. "Johnny," he said, with an effect of male gruffness so like his father's that Miss Phipps smiled.

"Come and sit by us. Grannie's coming down later. Shall we make a sand castle, Johnny? Mummy, Johnny and I are going to make a sand castle."

Miss Phipps found herself settled without choice in the shelter of a small stone pier with Jancis at her side, while Vicky and Johnny made a sand castle a few yards away.

"Very well!" thought Miss Phipps, accepting the situation. "Now for it!"

She drew out of her handbag the bottle message and without comment handed it to her companion.

"What is it? Oh! This is Vicky's handwriting," said Jancis, smiling. "6 Hill Road, Brittlesea. Yes—my husband has taught her to write our address—in case she is ever lost, you know. Is anything wrong, Miss Phipps?"

"No," whispered Miss Phipps, almost choked by surprise and disappointment.

"It looks like the piece of paper she put in a bottle when we were at Rylan Bay last week."

"Yes," stammered Miss Phipps. She explained briefly how she had retrieved the bottle from the waves.

"The currents bring everything back to Rylan Bay, my husband says. Vicky!" called Jancis.

Vicky obediently ran to them.

"Is this the paper you put in the bottle at Rylan Bay last Tuesday afternoon?"

"Yes! Yes!" cried Vicky gleefully. "Did you find it, Miss Pipps? I hoped it would sail right away to France or the other side of the world. But if you found it I don't mind, Miss Pipps."

"Did you write anything on the other side of the paper, Vicky?" asked Miss Phipps hesitantly.

"No."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not—this?" said Miss Phipps, turning it over.

"Help me," read Vicky. "No, I didn't write that."

"Where did you get the paper, Vicky?" asked her mother, leaning a little forward to read the message.

"It was just blowing about on the shore," said Vicky.

"Vicky! Vicky!" called Johnny, and she danced away.

"Did *you* write this appeal for help, Mrs. Hesseldine?" asked Miss Phipps.

"No, of course not. Are you not well, Miss Phipps?" said Jancis.

"Quite well. A trifle disappointed, that is all."

"I see it all!" cried Jancis suddenly. "You read that and you thought it a real appeal for help, and you came to the address to see if you could help. That was why you went to see my husband too—to find out what help was needed, and by whom."

"Yes. It was just—well, vanity on my part," said Miss Phipps.

"I don't think so," said Jancis warmly. "To take so much trouble for utter strangers! It was good and kind. Miss Phipps!"

"Yes?"

"I didn't write the message, but I need help all the same. Or rather, I need advice. I feel," said Jancis, "that I can trust you."

"I am entirely at your disposal, my dear," said Miss Phipps. "But do not tell me anything you may possibly regret later."

"It's about Vicky," said Jancis, looking away. "She's illegitimate, you know. I was not married to her father."

"My dear," said Miss Phipps gently. "Youthful indiscretions of that kind have happened before in human history and been forgiven."

"Yes. But Philip wants to adopt her legally. And I want him to do so. It will be so much better, so much easier for her in later life."

"I agree."

"The sooner it is done, the better."

"Quite right."

"But there will be formalities, papers to sign. Her parentage will have to be stated. It will become known that she is illegitimate. Shall I hope to conceal it, or shall I tell?"

"Absolute truth between husband and wife is the only sound foundation for married life," said Miss Phipps.

"What do you mean? Of course *Philip* knows!" exclaimed Jancis angrily. "It's *Mrs.* Hesseldine."

"You and Philip are keeping the truth from her?"

"Yes, at the moment."

"That accounts for your distress and your husband's. But what accounts for *her* distress? Believe me, it is as strong as yours."

"Really? I haven't observed any distress on her part."

"She is as preoccupied with concealing it as you are preoccupied with concealing yours."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But what are you suggesting?" said Jancis, puzzled. "Surely you don't mean—"

"Here you are!" said Mrs. Robert Hesseldine, walking briskly down the little pier. "I've been looking for you all over. You're not in view from the prom. I caught sight of Vicky at last."

She seated herself by Jancis and glanced at Miss Phipps distrustfully.

"My little godson Johnny Tarrant," said Miss Phipps, waving an introductory hand.

"Mrs. Hesseldine," cried Jancis, cutting across this. "You have perhaps wondered why I continually postpone Philip's adoption of Vicky."

Mrs. Hesseldine hesitated. Her rather artificial look of brightness was suddenly gone.

"It is because Vicky is an illegitimate child. I was not married to her father. He was a married man. He left me and I don't know where he is—and I don't want to know. Vicky's parentage will have to be stated on the application form. I did not want you to know all this," panted Jancis.

"Jancis," said Mrs. Hesseldine slowly, "I have known it for several months."

"Known it?"

"Yes. You forget that I was a nurse before my marriage, and have many friends in the nursing profession. One of them attended you when Vicky was born. She recognized you in photographs I showed her of you and Philip on your wedding day."

"Do you feel very bitterly towards me, Mrs. Hesseldine?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Hesseldine painfully. "What I feel is of little consequence. It is what Philip will think when he hears, which has so distressed me."

"First Miss Phipps insults me and then you!" cried Jancis, the angry color flying to her cheeks. "Do you suppose I should marry Philip without telling him? He has known for years. He knew Vicky's father. That's how I met Philip. He begged me to marry him before Vicky was born. I refused, and I refused many times because I thought I ought not to spoil his life by bringing my troubles into it. But at last he convinced me—perhaps I was wrong—I hope not—that I was necessary to his happiness. Philip's happiness is all I care for except Vicky," faltered Jancis.

"Oh, Jancis!" began Mrs. Hesseldine, weeping.

"Johnny, come and get your coat!" cried Miss Phipps loudly. "It's time we went home."

The weather was gray and misty next morning, and Miss Phipps's spirits matched the weather as she doggedly climbed the cliff path toward the Warren.

Inspector Tarrant had snorted with derision on the previous evening when she told him of the hap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

py denouement in the Hesseldine family.

"Your detection went for nothing," he said.

"That's not quite fair, John," said Mary. "If Aunt Marian hadn't followed up the bottle clue, if she hadn't discerned that something was wrong in the Hesseldine family, if she hadn't shown the paper to Jancis, the discovery that each Hesseldine knew Jancis's secret, and was trying to hide it from the other, would never have been made."

"They would have discovered it for themselves. Outside interference in family affairs is always a mistake. However," conceded Tarrant, "I withdraw my laugh, Aunt Marian. But I still allow myself a smile."

He looked so tired as he sat there eating a late supper after another fruitless day that Miss Phipps smiled too, though not too happily.

For she felt he was right. She was ashamed of her interference, of the lies she had told—especially to Philip Hesseldine. She decided on the spot to make one of her lies to him true—by taking a real interest in the Warren. So here she was, doggedly climbing the path to which Mary had directed her, in a chilly mist.

Somewhat unexpectedly the massive gray walls and towers of Brittle Keep loomed up before her.

There was a man in a raincoat and a uniformed policeman strolling about the grassy cliff-top, and Miss Phipps perceived that this side of the Keep was under observation. It was easy to see where the new wing had been built (a couple of hundred years ago, judged Miss Phipps), which was the study window, where the window cleaner's ladder had rested.

"Looking for the emeralds?" she called jokingly to the policeman.

"Who isn't?" he said, giving her a shrewd look nevertheless.

He made a slight gesture toward the cliff edge. Miss Phipps, peering over, saw below on the gray sea a vessel which was obviously a police launch, and two or three smaller boats. The mist swirled. The height was dizzy. Miss Phipps drew back and walked on.

For five minutes the path was broad and clear. Then, amid masses of gorse and heather, it divided. On the left a tiny track descended abruptly. On the right a sandy path went evenly forward. Miss Phipps, her usually high spirits daunted by her Hesseldine experience, decided timidly that the tiny track was not a path, and went to the right.

It was a long, long walk, and not a very interesting one. The mist began to clear away; from time to time she caught glimpses of a jumble of heather, gorse, and rock on her left, from which rose the sound of surf—inexplicably, for the sea seemed far away. On her right the road from Brittlesea was now visible, running at a distance below hedges and sloping fields.

She had walked a mile or so away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the sea, a mile parallel to the road, and then a mile toward the sea, when suddenly she found herself on top of a grassy headland, in blazing sun.

Far down to her right lay Rylan Bay. Below her to the left stretched the tumbled mass of rock and heather which was now, clearly enough, the Warren with its caves and chasms. Below the Warren, on the distant sea, appeared Kelly's white rowboat, approaching from the direction of Brittlesea. He ceased to row and began to haul in lobster pots, empty them of their victims, and weight and return them, dropping them from a buoy into the rocky crevices. Beyond the Warren rose a headland which now looked close enough to throw a pebble onto it. And sticking up above this headland was an odd stone conformation.

"What's that? Good heavens!" exclaimed Miss Phipps. "It's the top of Brittle Keep Tower!"

She now perceived that she had been walking for these last two hours round the edge of the Warren, across which a short cut would have brought her in a mere ten minutes. As bird flew or fish swam, Brittle Keep was barely half a mile away. Still, perhaps it had been wisest not to tackle the Warren chasms in a mist.

Miss Phipps turned right and hurriedly thankfully down the long slopes of bracken to Rylan Bay.

Hot, hungry, and exhausted, she went into the café, which was empty, the morning bus having gone, the afternoon one not yet come. Maureen, looking very beautiful in spite of an even heavier make-up than before, came out of the back room to greet her. A look of fear crossed the girl's face; it was clear she recognized her.

"Some luncheon, please."

"We don't serve lunches. There's only lobster," sulked Maureen.

"*Anything* will do," said Miss Phipps.

She ate an enjoyable lobster caught by Maureen's grandfather Kelly yesterday, tea, bread and butter, chocolate biscuits, and calling Maureen, drew out her purse to pay.

"Let's see," said Maureen. "There's lobster. That's three and six, and tea that's tenpence, and how many biscuits did you have?"

"Three," said Miss Phipps. "And bread and butter too."

Maureen sighed, and fetching a notebook and pencil from the counter, began to write down the items.

Miss Phipps's eyes goggled. The little book was a last year's diary. The *help me* message had been written on just such a page.

"Maureen! *You* wrote that message!" she cried.

"What do you mean?" blustered Maureen.

"You wrote *help me* on a page of that diary. You meant to give it to that nice young man who comes here to admire you. Then your

LICENSED TO OZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grandfather came in and you didn't dare. You quietly dropped the message out of the window behind your back. The paper blew away. Why do you want help, my dear?" said Miss Phipps firmly.

"Boo hoo!" bellowed Maureen, bursting into tears.

She threw herself into Miss Phipps's arms and wept cosmetics all over her clean blouse.

"Tell me about it, Maureen," urged Miss Phipps.

"Grandfather didn't know what they were," wept Maureen defensively. "He thought they were cheap stuff—costume jewelry, you know. He gave them to me to wear. Then next day there was a long piece in the newspaper and he took them back and said I mustn't say a word."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Phipps. She had suddenly remembered how near, by sea, Brittle Keep was to Rylan Bay; she had remembered old Kelly hauling up his lobster pots. "Oh," she repeated. "The Southshire emeralds."

"That's right. They were tangled in the top of one of his lobster pots —in the wickerwork, you know, when he pulled it up out of the sea."

"But there's a reward offered for their recovery, you silly child!" cried Miss Phipps. "Your grandfather has only to tell the police at once—"

"He's afraid the police mightn't believe him. He has a record, you see. He was in the County Gaol at the same time as that Slippy Smithwaite, and he thinks the police will think it's a put-up job between them. Slippy must have snatched those emeralds and thrown them over the cliff when the police came so quick. But Grandpa wasn't in on it—honest he wasn't! He's been running straight ever since he came out of gaol and we came here."

"He hasn't thrown the emeralds away into the sea?" cried Miss Phipps in sudden alarm.

"No. He can't bear to do that, he says, now he knows how valuable they are. He keeps them in his hip pocket—won't put them down for a minute. Oh, Lord!" cried Maureen, sobbing and pointing, "there he is coming in now."

The white rowboat was heading straight toward them down the long narrow bay. Miss Phipps observed Kelly's easy powerful strokes, remembered his strong body, his impatient speech and angry eye, and wondered what argument a plump elderly lady like herself could possibly find to make him tell his story to the police. Her heart sank.

"I didn't ought to have told you," wailed Maureen. "Oh, there's the busload now," she went on as a hum of voices rose through the sunny air. "Grandpa tries to come in when they're arriving, so they'll see how fresh the lobsters are. I must do my face," she concluded, scurrying to the mirror.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miss Phipps longed to advise her to wash the face first, but not liking to be unkind, went out of the cottage instead. As she stood there, with the hum of voices swelling behind her and Kelly rowing fast inshore, she saw that infuriating bottle again, bobbing up and down on the incoming tide. If only she'd never seen it!

"Maureen! Maureen!" shouted Miss Phipps, rushing into the café. "Quick, quick, before the bus people come!"

She thrust the largest bucket and spade she could see into Maureen's hands and dragged her down the beach to the tide wrack.

"Dig! Quickly! Put a jellyfish and a heap of seaweed in the bucket," urged Miss Phipps.

"Why?" said Maureen.

"Because you've just found the emeralds caught in the sea wrack deposited by the tide!" cried Miss Phipps.

She snatched up the bucket and ran to the water's edge. Kelly, who had driven the nose of his boat ashore, now leaped out and began to pull the boat up on the beach.

"Mr. Kelly! Maureen has just found the Southshire emeralds tangled in the seaweed!" cried Miss Phipps, waving the bucket at him. "Look! In here! I'm Detective-Inspector Tarrant's aunt," she added in a low, penetrating voice. "Put them in here at once and let Maureen earn the reward, you silly fellow."

The bus passengers peered into the bucket with awe.

"However did you find them, dear?"

"She saw the gleam among the seaweed," prompted Miss Phipps.

"I saw the gleam among the seaweed," repeated Maureen. Her natural quickness of wit then reasserted itself, and she added, "And I ran back and picked up the first bucket and spade I saw."

"But how could the emeralds get *here?*" queried another passenger.

"All the flotsam on this coast is drawn into this bay by the tide," explained Miss Phipps. "It's something to do with the Warren, you know."

"That's true enough," croaked Kelly, wagging his head.

"Your picture will be in all the papers, Maureen," said the Cockney young man admiringly.

For the first time in Miss Phipps's acquaintance with Maureen, the girl smiled.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Detective-Inspector Tarrant. His tone, however, was mild. "You fixed it somehow, Aunt Marian."

"It is absolutely true in essentials, John," said Miss Phipps.

"Well, at least it's taken you away from the Hesseldines," said Tarrant.

"On the contrary. The bottle led me to the Hesseldines, and the Hesseldines led me to the emeralds," said Miss Phipps with a smile.

LICENSED TO UNE.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL ZUROY**

TITLE: ***The Shy Man and the Lemon Tarts***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Every day, for weeks, the shy, nervous little man came into the bakery and bought three lemon tarts. Strange what that can do to a neglected woman!*

"I—I DON'T KNOW JUST HOW TO begin," Mrs. Bander said. Her voice was hoarse and nervous, though under more control than it had been earlier in the day when they had brought her in to the police station. She was a woman of perhaps twenty-eight, attractive if you weren't too critical, wearing her hair pulled neatly back.

"Tell it your own way," said Detective Joe Desicho. Standing, Desicho looked like a wrestler about to pounce; seated, he was a comfortable mass inviting confidence. "Don't worry about form. Let's start with your husband. We found him knifed to death in your bakery, near the ovens. You admit you did it. Okay. Why? What led up to it? Like that."

The stenotypist got ready to take Mrs. Bander's statement. The only other person in the well-worn office was Detective Mary Palmer, who was waiting patiently.

"Up to a few weeks ago," Mrs. Bander began, "there was nothing wrong between me and Harold. Nothing. Certainly a woman wants attention and romance, but she's got to realize it's important to make a living too. I mean, she's got to do her work and a man's got to do his, and besides, you both get tired.

"Our little bakery was doing all right, but it didn't run itself. A woman can't expect a man to think of nothing but her when he's got to buy supplies and watch the ovens and bake the bread and cakes and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pies in that awful heat and carry heavy loads.

"I did the selling, but Harold did everything else and he usually looked sweaty and mussed up and he talked mean to me sometimes and he never acted loving and devoted, even after work; but don't think I didn't understand. I did. I was willing to take it.

"As long as I could get a few kicks from other men.

"Now, don't get me wrong. I'm no tramp. Don't think I had illicit relationships with the men customers, because I didn't. But you know how it is, you get men coming into a store, some of them will make remarks. I enjoyed this, that's the truth. I needed some masculine attention, and I wasn't getting it from Harold.

"I mean, when a man looks into your eyes and says nice things, a woman gets a tingle out of it, even if she don't let on.

"Harold didn't pay attention to this. I guess he figured it was just talk and a customer was a customer. No, there wasn't much romance in Harold.

"But I needed these other men. I mean, a woman needs a little more than glass windows and counters and shelves full of baked stuff and smells and flour and dough and once in a while her husband sticking his head out of the back room and barking at her.

"Well, one day this man came in. I'd never seen him before. He was not the type that appealed to me; not tall or strong or cute or anything. He had a kind of sallow doughy face and sort of unromantic features—blobby and saggy, and blinky eyes and glasses and a slanty forehead that ran into a baldy head. I mean, he was no movie star.

"He didn't make any remarks. I didn't expect him to. He wasn't the type. His eyes blinking, he said in a voice that wasn't at all manly, 'Three of those lemon tarts, please.'

"He paid for them and left. I remember noticing that even though his eyes were nervous, they seemed lonesome and sincere, like a puppy's, sort of.

"Well, he returned the next day. The store was busy, so he had to wait behind the other customers. His eyes kept blinking and when I looked at them they'd slide off mine, like they were frightened. He wasn't a wise-guy or pushy type, that was sure. He even let people get ahead of him out of turn. Finally I motioned him to the counter, feeling sorry for the little guy.

" 'Three lemon tarts,' he said.

"Well, he was back the following evening, and again he bought three lemon tarts. 'I guess you must like them,' I remarked, but he just looked scared, mumbled something, and hurried out.

"He kept coming back, not missing a day, always buying three lemon tarts, always nervous. I got to expecting him, sort of nervous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

myself, because I never knew when he'd sidle in. It could be any time, day or evening. I found that I was thinking about him. He was nothing to dream about—no movie star, like I said—but I couldn't figure him. Sometimes I'd catch him staring at me when he thought I wasn't noticing. His eyes held a secret. And they were full of longing.

"It was always three lemon tarts. I couldn't figure that. Never one or two or four. Never rolls or cherry pie or eclairs or cheese cake or cookies or French bread. Just three lemon tarts.

"I kept trying to get him into conversation, but he'd hardly talk. He'd just stutter and shift his eyes.

"Nancy, our part-time salesgirl, noticed him. She said that he was sweet on me. 'That sad-sack!' I laughed, but privately I was beginning to think the same thing. He'd been coming in for a couple of weeks now, faithfully, every day, shy, afraid to talk to me—but always with that sort of hopeful, longing expression in his eyes.

"Well, it was doing something to me. The thought that this pathetic little guy, this earnest guy who couldn't wisecrack, might be hiding a deep feeling for me—well, it was touching. I mean, if a man feels he must see a woman every day, even if that's all, it's a pretty strong feeling, ain't it?

"I'd never had true devotion from a man in all my life.

"Even Harold was beginning to notice, although he usually didn't pay attention to the customers. 'Who's this creep comes in every day?' he asked. 'Don't he get tired of lemon tarts? What is he, soft on you or something?'

"'Maybe,' I said. 'Why? He's a customer, ain't he?'

"Harold scowled. 'I don't like the creep. I don't want him around. I'm going to fix him some tarts, special, will taste like burned rubber. You be sure to give them to him.'

"'Are you jealous, dear?'

"Harold snorted. 'Jealous, hell! I just don't like the creep.'

"Well, Harold fixed up the tarts. At first I wasn't going to sell them to this guy. It would be a dirty trick to play on my admirer. But then I thought, maybe it would be a test.

"I mean, maybe all the guy wanted was lemon tarts.

"If that was so, Harold's terrible concoction would drive him away. But if he really was soft on me, it wouldn't.

"So I sold him the tarts. And what do you think? He came back the following day. I sold him more of Harold's terrible tarts, but it didn't stop him. Another couple of days and then I was sure. It was me that was attracting him. Disgusted, Harold quit deliberately ruining the tarts.

"Well, it was odd, but the little guy stopped looking seedy to me. His doughy complexion now

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed romantically pale. His features weren't blobby and saggy any more—they were distinguished-looking. The slant of his forehead became enchanting. I had a wild desire to play with his sparse remnants of hair and kiss his poor bald spots.

"This scared me. Was I so starved for devotion that I was falling for this guy?

"I didn't want to, but I couldn't help it. If only Harold would show me a little affection . . .

"Well, during a lull in business one day I went into the back room and kissed Harold behind his sweaty ear. He jumped. 'Hey!' he yelled.

"I put my arms around him. He pulled away. 'Not during business hours,' he growled.

" 'Harold, Harold,' I said.

"He looked at me blankly. 'Gotta start another batch of dough.'

"I said, 'Harold, take me out tonight. Take me where there's music and dancing.'

"He said, 'You nuts? That costs. Turn on the television.'

" 'Harold,' I said, 'do you love me?'

" 'Married you, didn't I?' growled Harold.

" 'Tell me,' I said. 'You never say anything sweet to me.'

" 'Custard pie,' Harold said, and guffawed.

"After he subsided, I said, 'Harold, you never brought me any flowers. Will you buy me some?'

"He stared at me blankly. 'What's with you today? Flowers are a waste of money.'

" 'Harold,' I said. 'Please buy me one flower. One rose.'

"He turned away. 'I gotta finish this batch. You better get back and assort those crullers.'

"I went out front and assorted the crullers.

"A woman will stand for being taken for granted just so long. A woman will not live forever on just hope. A woman wants something more substantial than dreams.

"So the next day I said point-blank to my silent admirer, 'Something is attracting you to this bakery. Tell me what it is.'

"He was like a startled bird. He didn't know where to look. At last his eyes met mine, and they were full of longing. He swallowed, stuttered, and said, 'I . . . don't know . . . if I'm ready.'

" 'Then I'm right?'

" 'Please,' he said. 'A little more time.'

"I wanted to take him in my arms and mother him. He was so shy, so afraid of being hurt.

" 'What's your name?' I asked.

" 'B. Cornish.'

" 'Nice,' I said. 'What does the B stand for?'

" 'Benjamin.'

" 'Benny,' I said, liking the feel of the name on my tongue. 'Benny,' I whispered, 'I can get away tonight. My husband is going bowling. Why don't you take me somewhere?'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"His mouth opened.

"'Just to get to know each other,' I whispered. 'You don't have to say anything you'd rather not. Time for that later.'

"He eyed me uncertainly.

"'You're not married?' I asked, my heart sinking.

"'No.'

"'Then it's all right. Don't worry about my husband.'

"He was so shy—but I could see the longing deepen in his eyes.

"'Well . . . all right,' he mumbled.

"Our hands touched as I gave him his change. He must have felt the same tingle. He gulped and hurried out. I decided that I must make him happy.

"B. Cornish, B. Cornish, my heart sang.

"Well, he took me to the movies. All through the picture he sat stiffly, his eyes glued to the screen. He didn't even try to hold my hand. When my hand touched his, he jerked as though bitten.

"Poor B. Cornish, I thought. So repressed. So afraid of love. So resigned to hopeless adoration at a distance.

"He took me to a diner after the movie. We sat in a cozy booth. I did most of the talking while he chewed, glancing at me uneasily, mumbling something once in a while. Let him get used to me, I thought. He would learn in time how to express his devotion.

"He took me home, shook my hand quickly, and ran off. I looked after him fondly.

"When I went into the house, I got a shock.

"Harold was standing in the middle of the living room, looking grim. He'd come home early. 'What the hell is this?' he yelled. 'What did I just see through the window? Where you been with that creep?'

"'He is not a creep,' I told him coldly. 'He is a friend of mine.'

"Harold turned red. 'My wife don't go out with no men friends!' he yelled. 'You don't make no fool out of me!'

"If I'd thought Harold was jealous because he cared for me, things might have been different. But he was only thinking about himself, his own feelings—afraid only that I would make him look foolish.

"'Don't tell me what to do!' I flared. 'You never knew how to treat me, Harold. It's even possible I might leave you.'

"I must admit he seemed staggered. He turned pale. Then he recovered and roared, 'For that creep? Wait until I get hold of him tomorrow.'

"'You keep your hands off him!' I screamed.

"We quarreled far into the night.

"Well, the next day we went about our work in the bakery in bitter silence. I was terribly afraid. What would Harold do when my little Benny walked in?

"I could hear Harold banging pans around in the back room,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opening and closing the oven doors viciously. I caught a glimpse of him kneading dough with his muscular hands. Harold's arms had always attracted me—they were sturdy and masculine, with a small tattoo on the right forearm. Now I looked at those arms and shuddered, thinking what they could do to poor little B. Cornish.

"Rich baking smells came from the room. Once in a while Harold stalked out wheeling a bin full of bread or carrying a pan of pies. I arranged the window. I put the rye breads on the shelves behind me, the cookies and tarts in the counter, near the cream cakes, chocolate cakes, and rolls.

"Well, all day I waited on customers, hoping there would be other people in the store when B. Cornish showed up.

"But it was not to be. There were no other customers when Benny opened the glass door. I ran for the baking room, hoping to hold Harold back. Harold had seen him too and had stepped to the side of the room to put down a heavy pan of dough.

"'Out of my way,' Harold snarled. 'I'm going to teach that creep a lesson once and for all. He's not going to fool around with my wife.'

"I twisted myself around Harold. 'You leave him alone!'

"Harold pushed me aside easily. He started out to the front. I threw myself against him again, and this time he swept me away with a rough swing of his arm.

"His violence aroused something in me. It was the blindest rage I'd ever known. I didn't know what I was doing, and I'm not saying this just for the police record. I guess my resentment and disappointment in Harold were all mixed in with it.

"Anyway, I picked up something and struck him.

"It happened to be a bread knife. It sunk deep into Harold, and then he was on the floor, groaning . . .

"It was all over before I realized what had happened."

Mrs. Bander's voice trailed off.

The stenotypist leaned back and stretched. Detective Mary Palmer let out her breath in a sigh. Detective Desicho shifted in his chair and said, "A straightforward story, Mrs. Bander. This explains your husband's death. Now, if you'll clear up the rest of it, we won't bother you any more tonight."

Mrs. Bander passed a weary hand across her brow. "Yes."

The stenotypist leaned over his machine.

"I don't know how many thoughts went through my head in the few seconds that I stood there," Mrs. Bander resumed. "B. Cornish, the man who adored me, was waiting out front. Very little of the back room was visible from the front and I had closed the swinging doors when I went in. Benny could not have seen or heard anything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I remember thinking: I'll run away—we'll run away. If B. Cornish loves me, he will go with me. We can make a new life together.

"Breathing heavily, I went out to him. 'Benny,' I said.

" 'Mrs. Bander,' he said. 'I . . . think I have something to tell you now.'

" 'Yes, Benny,' I whispered.

" 'Yes,' he said. 'I'm ready to talk business.'

" 'Business, Benny?'

" 'Bakery business, Mrs. Bander. I buy and sell bakeries.'

" 'You buy and sell bakeries?'

" 'Of course.' His eyes slid away from mine shyly. 'That's why I've been coming here these last few weeks—to determine your business volume. To watch. Naturally, I couldn't tell you this before. I . . . I have to be careful. Bakery owners pad their volume when they know a buyer is watching.'

" 'I see,' I said dully. 'I see.'

" 'But I thought—since yesterday—that you had guessed.'

" 'No. I didn't guess.

"B. Cornish's eyes touched mine again and slid off. 'You must have suspected something. It was shrewd of you to get me to take you out last night. Personal contact can influence a buyer.'

" 'Oh, I'm very shrewd,' I said.

"B. Cornish rubbed his hands together and giggled nervously. 'Anyway, I'm prepared to make you a very nice offer. I'm ready now to do business.'

" 'Yes,' I said. 'You're ready to do business.' I looked into B. Cornish's eyes. They hadn't changed. The longing was still there. But now I understood. They were longing for business.

" 'Tell me one thing, Mr. Cornish, I said. 'Why did you always buy three lemon tarts?'

" 'I like them. Three is all I can eat. Very tasty, mostly, except for some bad ones for a few days—spoiled flour, I suppose."

" 'Yes,' I said. 'I'll be right back, Mr. Cornish. Just you wait right here.'

" 'Yes,' said B. Cornish. 'I'll wait.'

"I went into the back room and got the knife . . ."

After the matron had led Mrs. Bander away, Detective Mary Palmer said, "Between you and me, I don't know as I blame her."

"A double murder," Detective Desicho mused. "Quite a rap. But maybe it won't go too hard with her. After all, they can't charge her with premeditation . . ."

BRITISH BOOK CENTRE

The London House selection for this month is

"A BONE AND A HANK OF HAIR"

BY

LEO BRUCE

$3.25

Available at
122 East 55th Street
New York 22, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**PIERRE AUDEMARS**
TITLE:	***Born for Trouble***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	An Island in the Atlantic
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A subtle and insinuating story which combines the old-fashioned and the new . . . and which has a fascination in depth that will make this tale stick in your memory.*

THE MAGISTRATE RAISED HIS CLOSE-cropped grey head slowly from the papers on his bench.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked quietly.

The man in the enclosure swallowed and moistened his lips. Then he began to speak, slowly and hesitantly at first, then faster and with an ever-increasing intensity.

"Yes, Your Honour. I would ask in this instance for the clemency of the court. Every fact related here has been true. I have not attempted to deny any of them. But from my point of view they do not mean the same thing as—"

"I am afraid I do not see what you mean."

The interruption was definite and yet perfectly courteous. The man in the enclosure squared his shoulders and spoke with dignity and a passionate sincerity.

"I mean that the right interpretation of facts is everything—must be everything. I do not deny that I spoke to the girl. But she smiled at me first, in a provocative and unmistakable way. It came as a profound shock to me to hear in this court that she is still at school. You who have seen her will agree that she looks considerably older—so it should without doubt be understandable that I thought the same thing. I am alone here on the island, on a business trip, many miles away from my home and my family. I was lonely, and after a few drinks at my hotel, she seemed to offer the companionship I needed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I am not making excuses, Your Honour—I am simply trying to explain the facts. If it had not been for your Constable interrupting us on the cliff—"

Here his voice faltered and a film seemed to glaze his eyes as he continued with what was obviously a great effort.

"I can assure you that what would have happened would only have been what she wanted to happen. I would ask the court to consider that this is the first time in my life I have ever become involved in a matter of this nature, and that if I am sentenced on this charge my whole life and my career—which I think I may claim to have been not without some distinction—will be utterly ruined. I would ask the court to believe me when I swear that there was no question of force or indecency or corruption—but only a natural act between two consenting parties."

He finished speaking and a great hush enfolded the old-fashioned room. Everyone there waited, looking at the Magistrate.

And he sat at his bench, a lonely figure on the high dais, his head bowed, lost in thought.

Before him were all the papers—the documents, the charge, the depositions, the notes, the reports. He knew them all. His eyes looked at them, but he did not see them. He knew what Constable Carthelot had seen. He knew how the charge had read—"contributing to the delinquency of a minor"—considering that he had framed it himself in the light of the Constable's detailed evidence. Apparently Carthelot had discovered them just in time, otherwise the charge would have been a more serious one.

And he knew all about Marie Sanmarc—all about her lipstick and her short skirts and her plunging neckline—and the numerous complaints he had already received about her from the people in the port. If ever one was born for trouble, as surely as the sparks fly upwards, that girl was the one.

Everything this man had said could be true. What should he do? His office, with its almost feudal powers, was to administer justice on this lonely island, not to punish people unjustly and blacken people's lives, not to give people bitterness and resentment as crutches for twisted living . . .

He sighed and raised his head slowly, and it seemed to the man in the enclosure that all the spectators in that silent room caught their breath in unison and moved, imperceptibly and yet unmistakably, at the same time.

For a long moment the Magistrate looked at the man before him, his features impassive, his hands folded tightly before him on the bench. He studied the strong, lined features of the accused, grey now with apprehension, the silver hair receding from the high-domed forehead, and the lean erect figure

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

standing with such dignity—alone in that lofty panelled room of justice, alone against the majesty of the law.

And then quietly the Magistrate began to speak.

"Henry Victor Duke, you have been arraigned before this court and charged, according to the evidence, with one of the most despicable crimes known to mankind. On the evidence as brought to this court, no other course was possible. The evidence has been heard and not disputed."

He paused. The accused swayed a little on his feet and reached out one hand to clutch the railing of the enclosure.

Without altering the tone of his voice in the least degree, the Magistrate continued: "And yet what you have said in your defense—and particularly the manner in which you have said it—has impressed the court, whose principal object must always be the administration of justice. In this case it is felt that there are mitigating circumstances, and there is also doubt, and therefore the case is dismissed, upon payment of costs."

And again without the slightest alteration in his voice, the Magistrate continued: "One of you had better look after the accused. He appears to have fainted."

The small anteroom was quiet and cool from the width of ancient stone walls that absorbed and tempered the heat of the afternoon sun.

"Are you feeling better now, Mr. Duke?"

The man sipped at the glass of water he held in his hand before answering, and then his words came quickly, in a rush of sudden warmth.

"Yes, thank you, very much better. It was a stupid thing to do. I would like to say how much I appreciate—"

The Magistrate held up his hand and interrupted the flow of words with an even calmness.

"There is no need, Mr. Duke. I was confronted with a difficult decision, but I have no doubt I made the right choice. All this must have been a very great strain for you. Tell me, what are your plans now?"

Deliberately he kept his voice impersonal. He did not want this man's gratitude. He did not want to become involved. And even as these decisions formulated in his mind he wondered what had caused them.

"I don't know," the man muttered. "I shall go back, of course—but there is no 'plane until to-morrow morning. I can't go back to the hotel. I could reach the mainland by boat, but no one will rent me one—you should have seen their faces as I was escorted past the harbour to-day—"

"Yes. News travels fast in a small place."

"I don't mind going back to the hotel to sleep. After all, I shall have to pay for my room. But I could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not face them in the restaurant—some of the residents were there in the court-room—I saw them—"

His voice died to a whisper. He seemed to shrink in his chair, crushed under an invisible and yet awful weight of circumstance.

The Magistrate hesitated. He was essentially a fair-minded man. He felt, indefinably and yet forcefully, that he was under an obligation to finish something for which he felt at least partly responsible. He remembered all his decisions, and even as he remembered them he marvelled at the strength of this pity and compassion that was now breaking them.

"I was wondering," he heard himself saying diffidently, "if you would care to dine with me to-night. I am a widower, and I live quietly on the other side of the island—it is quite remote, which is perhaps a good thing under the circumstances. Then I can drive you back to the hotel later on."

For a long moment the man in the chair stared at him. Twice he began to speak, and twice he seemed to change his mind. Then he squared his shoulders and stood up. With a strange dignity he bowed, quite formally.

"You are more than kind," he said simply.

As the car began to climb the steep road which led up to where the ancient castle frowned in rugged and massive splendour right on the very edge of the cliff, the Magistrate's companion stirred in his seat.

"Of course," he said suddenly, "I did not connect it—you must be the Seigneur de la Haye!"

The Magistrate nodded.

"I am," he replied briefly.

"Of course," repeated the man softly, "I should have known, I should have realised—"

"Why? Does it make any difference?"

"No—no. None at all."

Something in his tone made the Seigneur glance at him curiously, but he was leaning out of the open window, staring up at the castle they were swiftly approaching.

"This afternoon you were dealing with the Magistrate of Queneau. To-night you are dining at the Château de la Haye. But I am still the same person."

The man drew in his head and looked at him.

"Yes. And I too am the same person. That is what we remain, isn't it—whatever we do?"

The Seigneur thought about this and was on the point of answering when the man pointed with an exclamation of surprise. The road had swung close to the cliff edge and for an instant, far below them, they could see the tiny cove and the boat-house and the lovely white lines of the *Cygne* as she heaved and dipped gracefully on the long Atlantic swell.

"What a beautiful boat! Is she yours?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes. About the fastest craft in the harbour. That is the sort of thing which is expected of me—like this castle. It is all very nice—but tends to diminish one's income."

The other man laughed politely.

By now they had reached the castle. The Seigneur swung the long car skilfully through the narrow stone gateway and pulled up in the forecourt. Then he opened the door and stepped outside.

"Welcome to the Château de la Haye," he said formally, and without waiting for an answer, walked towards the vast double timbered door.

Now they stood on the terrace with tall frosted glasses in their hands. Below and beneath them stretched the whole irregular panorama of the island, golden and brown and green and grey, a sun-drenched pattern cut out of the vast and tranquil and glittering sea.

The Seigneur sighed, not with sadness, but with appreciation and the never-ending wonder he always felt.

"It is beautiful," he said, "the most beautiful sight in the world."

His companion did not answer. He too was staring at the scene before them, but with a curious fixity, as if his eyes saw, not what lay beneath them, but inwards. And yet it was not long before he replied, quite simply.

"Yes. I envy you."

"Most people do. That is something I cannot change. Except perhaps by spending my life in a state of gratitude—and this I try to do. It affects nearly all my actions, as you will be the first to appreciate."

Steps sounded on the flagstones. The old housekeeper bowed formally.

"Dinner is served, monseigneur. And Mam'selle Jeannette asks to be excused, as her homework is exceptionally difficult. She will take something later, in her own room."

"Thank you, Marthe. Where is Jeannette now?"

"In the sun-parlour."

The two men strolled round the outer crenellated wall until they came to the south end, where a Seventeenth Century de la Haye had excavated some stones, inset a door, and added a sloping roof of blown glass in a mahogany frame to make a sun-parlour.

From one of the deep arm-chairs, drawn up with its back to the path, a bare arm waved to them as they passed.

The Seigneur reflected as he ushered his guest inside, but did not consider that any comment was necessary. His conversation with Marthe had been self-explanatory. And yet he reminded himself that he must speak to Jeannette at the first opportunity. Admittedly the weather was exceptionally hot, but it was obvious that she was getting too old for that halter and shorts.

The dinner was a gourmet's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dream. Marthe served efficiently and silently. The Seigneur uncorked the bottle of wine himself and poured with a fitting reverence.

His guest sipped his glass slowly and appreciatively, and then, raising his arm, emptied it perhaps a little too quickly.

"Wonderful," he said loudly, "I have never tasted such wine before."

The Seigneur smiled, hesitated a little, and then politely refilled the other's glass.

"Yes—one of the few things on this island which respects and does not diminish one's income. There is no duty. That is why I have to keep in such close touch with the coast-guards—a considerable amount of smuggling is done from this island. And that is why knowledge in buying becomes even more important."

His guest laughed shortly and raised his glass again.

"Then I drink to your expert knowledge."

The Seigneur raised his own glass in courteous acknowledgment, but he barely moistened his lips. His face was grave as he replaced the Baccarat crystal carefully on the table.

"Wine is a good servant, Mr. Duke, but a bad master," he said slowly.

His mind was not thinking about the words he uttered. He was trying to remember something the man had said in court—something about wine. No, something about drinks. Yes, that was it: "After a few drinks at my hotel." He had been drinking before it happened. Did that mean anything?

Perhaps he ought not to have opened that bottle. And yet for a de la Haye to have proferred hospitality without wine was as unthinkable as for a de la Haye to have shown rudeness towards a guest. He had felt under an obligation, and to one of his nature there could be no peace until that obligation had been discharged, completely and honourably.

Yet the weather, in spite of the season, had been oppressively hot—too hot for drinking. And then the cocktails had been strong. He had had to make them strong, because of the heat and all the ice that was needed.

His guest's glass once more was empty. The Seigneur reached for the bottle and again he hesitated.

"I find it hot for a wine of this bouquet," he remarked slowly, carefully keeping his voice expressionless. "Would you care perhaps for a little ice-water—"

"No—no. You would not deny me the pleasure of a wine such as this, would you?"

And he lifted his glass to be refilled. The Seigneur had no option. No one had ever questioned the manners of a de la Haye.

And yet there were other methods. He felt justified in using them.

"I suppose you would not care to talk about—about this afternoon?" he suggested gently.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He knew that the remark was in bad taste, and yet somehow he had to shock the man back into sobriety.

For a moment he though he had succeeded. His guest sat perfectly still, and a strange silence enfolded the dinner-table—a silence so profound that the Seigneur heard the breeze sweeping and sighing past the open windows on its way down to the sea.

Then, when the tension had grown almost unbearable, the man laughed again, shortly and harshly. and lifted his glass to drink—and the Seigneur knew that he had failed.

"No—no—we can forget all that."

The empty glass banged down defiantly on the table.

"But yes—there is one thing—" the man went on.

"And what is that?" asked the Seigneur.

"You can tell me. That Constable—what was his name, Carthelot?—why should he have been patrolling that deserted part of the cliff? Surely his duties are in the port?"

"He is a good man, and energetic. He roams across the whole island, over and over again. Though normally, at this time of the year, he would have kept to the roads."

"That is what I thought. That is what I counted on. No one should have come there for weeks—damn him—damn him!"

Suddenly, with shocking violence he leaped to his feet.

The Seigneur looked up and saw the flush of the wine and the film glazing his eyes. He remembered then, with a sudden and blinding clarity, when he had seen that film before—when Duke had paused and faltered in court as he recounted Carthelot's interruption. The Magistrate had taken it for emotion and remorse, but it could just as well have been the memory at that moment—the exciting and ecstatic and enervating memory—of what was going to happen.

But then it was too late.

There was a blinding flash of light in front of his eyes and the whole world seemed to explode into blackness . . .

For a long time the Seigneur thought the banging must be coming from inside his head. It was only as his mind slowly cleared that he realised the sound was apart and distinct, and that it came from outside.

That would be Marthe, he thought vaguely as he forced himself slowly and painfully to his feet. Marthe locked in the kitchen, locked in with the cook. The only two servants immobilised and he unconscious beneath his own dining-table.

With a groan he forced himself to the front door. He flung open one portala and leaned against the stone arch of the porch, drinking in the sweet evening air in great gulps. Marthe would have to wait.

He looked at his car. It seemed to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crouch in dejection on four flat tires. On the flagstones beside the steps lay a tangle of telephone wire, ripped out of the wall.

And as he waited there in the bright hush of the evening he heard the sudden roar of the cabin cruiser's engine, muted as it rose from the cove at the foot of the cliff, diminished by the breeze and the currents and the outcrops of granite, hushed and yet unmistakable, faint and yet true . . .

The banging had ceased. Poor Marthe, he thought. She is old. She has grown tired. She must have been banging for a long time—dear God, how long, how long?

The castle slept in a deathly hush as the Seigneur made his way slowly to his study. There, in the peace of that beautiful book-lined room, he sat down heavily in front of a wall cabinet and opened the door.

A lever inside actuated the aerial, raising and lowering it into the shadow of one of the narrow twisted chimneys.

That was another thing expected of the Seigneur de la Haye, he reflected dully, that he did not permit his transmitter to deface the mediaeval outline of his castle, and in this, as in so many other things, he had taken pleasure in conforming.

Now his fingers pressed the key and quickly, methodically, he tapped out the call sign for the coastguard cutter, the only boat in the harbour from which the *Cygne* could not show a clean pair of heels.

His mind was busy, his brain was occupied. This was something that had to be done, something which absorbed all his energies and mercifully, did not permit him to think.

Then, once his message had been received and acknowledged, the banging began again. Now he would have to let Marthe out. And then—and then he would have to go into the sun-parlour.

For a long time he sat there, thinking and trembling, while the banging seemed to swell and reverberate and enter, in some indefinable and almost unbearable way, to mingle with the throbbing in his aching head.

If only the banging would stop, he thought, he would get up. He would get up and go into the sun-parlour. Marie Sanmarc had escaped. There could have been no escape for Jeannette.

Duke had chosen his first place well. Normally it would have been weeks before anyone passed, by which time he would have been beyond the reach of justice. Now there had been no need to choose a place. He thought he would be safe in the cabin cruiser. Frustrated in one attempt, his desire inflamed by drink, a quick and seemingly safe getaway before him—why should he hesitate?

The Seigneur knew now what they would have found if Constable Carthelot had not taken the cliff path . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ALFRED MARTINEZ**

TITLE: ***Ace in the Hole***

TYPE: Prison Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A terrifying account of Carson's last hours on Death Row—waiting for his lawyer to bring the proof that would save the old man from the gas chamber . . .*

RALPH CARSON AWOKE FROM A nightmare in the stillness before dawn, bolted upright in his bunk, and looked wildly around. Not until his eyes had adjusted to the dim light did he realize where he was, and then he fell back with a deep sigh. He had dreamed he was falling from a mountain peak, hurtling helplessly to jagged rocks below. He had awakened abruptly just an instant before impact. Now he let the memory of the frightening dream fade, and when it was gone, Carson dozed fitfully in his cell on Death Row . . .

It was Thursday, October 30th. Darkness was beginning to fade from the sky, draining through shades of gray to a pale light. Carson opened his eyes occasionally to squint at the approaching dawn through a barred window across the corridor from his cell. Death Row was on the sixth floor and the window was high up from the floor. Thus, his only view was a small patch of sky.

Ralph Carson appeared older than sixty. His teeth had come out years ago and since he refused to wear false ones his mouth puckered inward in a wrinkled, leathery face. His brown hair had thinned and turned gray. He stood only five feet ten inches tall and, because he had lost weight in prison, he seemed, shorter. In contrast, he had a barrel-like chest and square shoulders. His blue eyes glittered with strange intensity.

But Carson was distinguished by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than his appearance. In exactly twenty-nine hours he would die in the prison gas chamber. This should have been a horrifying realization to him as he stretched into full wakefulness with the broadening dawn. Even the most hardened criminal begins to die a little the day before his execution, when at last full comprehension of his fate rushes with devastating clarity to his brain.

But Carson, free now from the aftereffects of his nightmare, splashed water on his face, grinned toothlessly at the guard captain, and hungrily ate his breakfast. For he had a big ace in the hole, and he would play it if he had to.

Carson had been on Death Row for three months. He entered it arrogantly, convinced that he would not be executed, scornful of the fears of his fellow inmates. The trial had lasted four weeks, and when it was over he was convicted of premeditated murder. The penality was a foregone conclusion and the brutality of the crime demanded the harshest punishment. A young nurse had surprised a burglar in her apartment and had been cut down with an ax. The weapon was never found.

"How was breakfast, Pop?" The guard pushed into Carson's cell and took the eating utensils, interrupting the prisoner's thoughts.

Carson winked. "Not bad chow. I may stick around for a while."

"Sure, Pop."

The guard left, and the man in the next cell called to Carson. "Still smoking that stuff, old man?"

"What?"

"Still think you're not going to the green room tomorrow?"

His tone nettled Carson. "I *know* I'm not."

"That's what Little Sam said a week ago, Pop. Remember Little Sam?"

He remembered. Sam Rogers, a grotesque dwarf of a man, had waited peacefully through his weeks on the Row for an angel to save him. He was convinced it was coming, alert all day and most of the night to the miracle. So desperate was his conviction that other prisoners had waited with him, listening for the redeeming angel. But it didn't come. Little Sam was taken away, and the terror of his screams still haunted Death Row.

"You'll go," Carson's neighbor drawled.

It isn't an easy death. Guards come for the doomed man the afternoon before the execution. They lead him, arms and legs in chains, through barred doors, down an elevator, and then to a bare holding cell on the main floor, just fifteen steps from the chamber.

They give him a change of clothes, writing material, a radio. They feed him whatever he may want throughout the last night. The warden, attorneys, and a clergyman visit him. If he can, he sleeps.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The guards come again a few minutes before ten the next morning. "It's time," they say. They lead or drag him to the metal-and-glass chamber and strap him to one of two chairs. A stethoscope is taped over his heart so that a physician outside can pronounce him dead.

The door clangs shut, and the turn of an outside wheel hermetically seals the chamber. The prisoner looks to the right and faces the handful of tense, drawn witnesses. He catches the gaze of one and holds it. There's a sound, and he knows it is cyanide pellets shooting into sulphuric acid. He holds his breath, and when he can hold it no longer, he gasps for oxygen. Instead, he gulps in the poison air and plunges into oblivion . . .

Carson, who had been dozing, awoke perspiring. He raised himself from his bunk and looked down the spotless corridor to the clock on the wall. It was almost noon. He had spent most of the morning sleeping. He put on the headset to his radio and waited drowsily through soft music for the news. It came with startling suddenness:

"The State Supreme Court refused today for a second time to stay the execution of Ralph Carson, who dies tomorrow in the gas chamber. There seems little hope now of Carson winning last-minute mercy. The Governor has refused to intervene."

Carson threw off the headset. It was time to play his ace. "Guard!" he shouted, coming explosively awake.

Panic had crept into his voice. It propelled the captain urgently toward him and attracted the attention of the shotgun guard who walked the length of the corridor.

"What is it?"

"I've got to see my attorney!"

The officer relaxed. "Didn't he tell you what time he'd be in?"

"No. I told him I'd call when I wanted him. Now I've got to see him."

"You told him *you'd* call?"

"I gotta see him!"

The captain sighed and shook his head. "Okay, Pop. We'll get him." He left.

The terse radio report had shaken Carson's confidence. He rubbed his calloused hands together nervously. He had been certain the court would reverse the penalty. They wouldn't kill an old man—not on circumstancial evidence!

"Harry," he called to the man in the next cell.

"Yeah, old man?"

"Were you listening to the radio?"

"Yeah."

"You heard?"

"I heard."

Carson groped. "What do you think it means?"

"What the hell do *you* think it means?" The other man paused. "It means just what I said a while ago."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carson fell silently on his bunk. Time passed. He refused lunch, too immersed in his thoughts to desire food. Gloom settled over him. Fear tightened his belly. He said to himself, *I don't want to die,* and even the sound of his inner voice was frightening. The immensity of his punishment was finally reaching out to him, but before Carson could feel its total impact, the guard came to him again, breaking the spell.

"Your attorney is here," he said, unlocking the cell door. "He's downstairs."

The prisoner was taken to the condemned men's visiting room, a dim cubicle off the main visiting section. On one side of a dividing screen, his wrists shackled, sat Carson. On the other side was his attorney, James Decker.

"I've got something to tell you," Carson began immediately.

Decker appeared haggard. He rubbed his chin absently.

"I can *prove* I didn't do it!" the old man exclaimed boldly. He rested back in his chair to savor the lawyer's reaction.

Decker stopped rubbing his chin and stared. He leaned forward, his face near the screen. "Tell me," he ordered tensely. "I've done everything I can."

Carson played his ace in a grand manner. "There was another guy in the room with me that night—a kid by the name of Vic Herman. He's the guy that did it. He got panicky when the girl found us and he hit her." Carson grinned. "I got the ax, and I'll give you odds it's still got his fingerprints on it!"

The lawyer continued to stare in amazement. "You kept this from me until now?"

Carson nodded, pleased with his deception.

Anger gathered on Decker's face, and he bit off his words in icy syllables. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I didn't want to rat on the guy. We been pals a long time. I thought I'd get off—I really did."

"And now it's getting too close for comfort." The lawyer fell silent. His anger drained. Then he said, "It may be a hell of a lot closer than you think, Carson. Where's the ax?"

Details of a hillside hiding place poured from the convict. He could see the ax in a box, buried under the earth. The attorney regarded him passively, then pushed himself to his feet. "I'll go after it," he said finally. "If there are prints on it, it will probably be good for at least a delay."

"Sure it will," Carson said. "One other thing—I can tell you where Vic is staying. Pull him in. Sweat him. He'll talk." He gave the lawyer the address of a waterfront rooming house. Decker wrote it down, becoming eager in spite of himself.

"Maybe you'll make it," the lawyer said. Then he was gone.

Carson stood up. The dread

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which had come over him after the radio report began to fade. He felt buoyant as he brushed insolently past the guard on his way back to the Row.

Then the waiting began. But the old man was used to waiting. Back in his cell, he grinned. The ax would be there. Decker would find Vic. How Carson had waited for this day! How he had carefully nursed his ace in the hole since the trial! The image of the murder night was not too clear, but glimpses of memory drew Vic in harsh outline, lifting his arm, bringing the ax down.

Carson hadn't let it end there. He remembered taking the ax away from Vic—carefully so that he wouldn't get his own prints on it—and then burying it. How crafty! How wise to think ahead! Let Vic's prints remain on the ax—then stash it away for future use . . .

The cell door opened. The prison chaplain entered.

"Hello, padre," Carson grinned. "How's business?"

The chaplain smiled back. "You're in light spirits, Ralph. I'm glad you're taking it so well."

"Why not?" It would take Decker an hour to find the axe, another hour for the police crime lab to bring out and identify the prints, another hour to pick up poor, ignorant Vic. By five o'clock the attorney should be able to call on a judge and get a stay of execution.

The chaplain sat on the edge of the bunk and offered Carson a cigarette. He took one, and the chaplain lit it for him. "You find some hope, Ralph? I'm glad. Most men —" He stopped.

"Sure, I find hope, padre. I've got a ticket to freedom."

His comment didn't surprise the chaplain. He had heard it before from others on the Row. He simply looked away.

Carson, sensing doubt, told the chaplain of his ace in the hole. When he had finished, the visitor said, "You waited a long time to spring this, Ralph."

"I told you, padre. I didn't want to rat on Vic. But *now*—" He shrugged. "It's him or me." He told himself he had tried to spare the kid, hoping for a reprieve. It would have been the uncomplicated way.

"Ralph, have you thought about what would happen if the execution weren't stopped?"

The question startled Carson. His grin froze. The cold blue eyes flicked anger at the chaplain, and explosive forces showed in them. He teetered, realized the danger of an outburst, and subdued rage. "No judge in the world would let it happen—not when they've got *proof* they're killing an innocent man!"

The chaplain nodded. "I suppose you're right."

"Yes, sir, padre," Carson said with exaggerated sincerity, "things

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are going to be different when I get out. No more crime. I'm going straight. I'm going to get a job and maybe get married. Start all over."

"I'll pray for your success," the chaplain said quietly.

"You do that, padre."

The chaplain left at 3:30. It was exercise time. The men on the Row were released from their cells into the bleak corridor. The shotgun guard stood alert behind his protective screen. There were often fights, and once in the guard's memory, a prisoner had been strangled before guards could help him. This was no ordinary group of men. They had nothing to lose.

Carson wandered among them, proud of his light-hearted disregard of doomsday. He told jokes and recalled stories of how others had gone to their deaths. His fellow convicts were impressed that a man so soon to die could be cavalier in his attitude toward dying.

The exercise hour passed, and the prisoners were ordered back to their cells. Carson, watching his door close, noted that the clock at the end of the corridor said 4:30. The lawyer should be back soon, then everything would be all right.

Down the Row, a boy sang. The lonely tune drifted like winter fog along the drab walls and spread against the concrete barriers that divided the cells. Carson looked at the tiny patch of sky visible through the barred windows and remembered the cloudless days of the mountains where he had gone after the Army to work in a camp, intent on a new life.

What had happened? It was difficult to say. One night he had wandered into town. A few drinks, a fight, the dull thud of a bottle—that's how it always happened. Peace, until the rage in him built up. Peace, until he had to be with strangers. Slowly the unrest and anger had returned until he had gone back to crime, back to the ways of his youth before the Army.

It was a sad song the boy sang, full of remorse and longing. It filled Carson with loneliness. No one stopped the singing. There were strict rules on Death Row, but there was no rule against singing. Carson relaxed and let the tune hypnotize him, carrying him gently through untroubled time and space . . .

He woke with a start to the vacancy of silence. The music had stopped. No one was talking. No wind hummed through the barred window.

Carson sat up, listening. He looked around his cell to ground himself with the familiar. He got up and peered down the corridor. It seemed abandoned.

The Row was cloaked in eerie silence.

Then footsteps.

More than one person.

They moved at a funereal pace down the corridor from the guard's office.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carson strained against his cell door to see. Unsuccessful, he pulled back and waited breathlessly until the men came into full view. The chaplain and two guards stopped before his cell and opened his door.

The chaplain stepped forward, his hand extended. His face was shadowy and depressed. "We must go now, Ralph," he said softly. He took Carson's arm. The convict pulled away suspiciously. "Don't make it difficult," the chaplain said.

"What do you want?" Carson was bewildered.

"It's time to go downstairs."

Time to die? Time to go to the gas chamber? It couldn't be. Terror burst in Carson like the bright stars of a Roman candle.

"Time? It's not time! It's still Thursday!" He backed away.

"Padre, if you'd like—" One of the guards moved forward.

"No," the chaplain said. "Ralph will come." He turned back to the convict. "You must."

Where was Decker? Why hadn't the attorney come? Carson glanced around, looking for a way to run, and saw the clock. He understood suddenly why they were there. Dozing, he had lost track of time. They weren't there to take him to the chamber. It was just time to go to the holding cell! He still had fifteen hours!

"Now I get it," he said with strained jocularity. "The holding cell! Sure. I've got lots of time. I thought at first—okay, let's go."

Carson swaggered down the corridor to the end of the Row where his wrists and ankles were shackled. His look told everyone he would make it. He talked loudly, and his parting shot to the Row was, "Well, I'll never see this place again."

He hadn't meant it quite that way. What he meant was—but it didn't matter to the men who unsmilingly watched him go. They thought he would die. He knew he would live. Goodbye, their expressions said.

"See you in church," Carson called back.

Down the elevator, through doorways arched with steel, down cool, clean corridors that were unending aisles of gray. Finally, the holding cell. Carson walked in with a will and watched smugly as the guards closed the cell door behind him and the chaplain. He had already been unshackled. One of the guards left. The other stood by, his hands clasped behind him. It was the death watch.

The Warden came shortly thereafter. He was a thin, forlorn man, older than his forty-five years, bent under the weight of an unbearable, invisible burden.

"Well, I've got a crowd today!" Carson joked. "Nothing like a crowd to see you off."

Carson talked with him, but during the course of the conversation his mind wandered. Where was Decker? It was 6:30—the attorney should have been there. It got dark

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by 7:30. He went over it again in his mind: An hour to find the ax, an hour for the fingerprints, and an hour to arrest Vic.

But here it was 6:30! Decker should have arrived!

He wiped his perspiring hands on the new prison denims they had given him. A minor delay, that's all. He'll get here in time. It will be all right. He thought about the men on Death Row and scoffed at the angels they waited for. He waited for solid proof of his innocence, not for angels!

When the warden and the chaplain left, Carson turned impatiently to the guard. "What time is it?"

"Six forty-five."

He lay back on the mattress in moody silence. For the first time since he had played his ace in the hole, a paralyzing doubt crept into Carson's mind. Suppose Decker fails? He won't, the convict told himself angrily. I planned for it. I was careful. It told him exactly where to look for both the ax and for Vic. I *know* there are prints on the handle. There's no question that a judge will grant a delay. I know judges! I know the system!

7:00.

The chaplain returned and they worked out a menu for his dinner. Carson toyed with the food, and had most of the steak taken away.

The prison physician examined him. He was courteous and efficient. Carson tried to joke, but the jokes were humorless and somehow he couldn't remember any of the punch lines.

Where's Decker? That's what he wanted to know—where's Decker?

"Chaplain, I need a favor," he said suddenly, his eyes bright.

"What's that, Ralph?"

"Call my attorney. Tell him to come *now*."

"I can't do that, but the warden will. I'll tell him."

The chaplain nodded for the guard to open the cell door, then hurried away.

"What time is it?" Carson demanded.

"Almost nine," the guard replied.

Only thirteen hours left. The thought filled his mind. I won't think about it. I won't be pessimistic. The guard gave him cigarettes and Carson chain-smoked. It left a bad taste in his mouth, but that didn't matter. He fidgeted, paced, and swept his hand nervously over his thinning hair.

The chaplain and the warden came back together. Carson tensed. The guard opened the cell door in slow motion. It seemed an interminably long time before the warden spoke. "I can't get him, Ralph. His office says he's working on your case and can't be reached."

Carson paled. "That's all right," he said with false confidence. "He'll probably be here any minute now." He winked at the chaplain.

He was alone periodically, and finally the warden returned to say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that Decker had telephoned and was still working. That was 11:00.

Pressure built inside of Carson. He held down outbursts of frustration. He paced. He fretted. Then, exhausted by the supreme effort it took him to quell his rage, he collapsed face-down on the mattress. Dazed by emotional fatigue, drugged by tension, the old man fell asleep. The guard watched.

Carson dreamed about the mountains. But instead of dazzling blue skies, there was a slate-gray overcast, and the crisp, invigorating air was a biting wind that howled through the naked pines. The clean, bright mountains were jagged rocks on which he stood, from which he fell endlessly through space . . .

He was jerked awake from the nightmare by an overwhelming sense of passing time.

"Time!" he shouted to the guard who stood impassive watch.

"Six o'clock," the guard replied tonelessly.

There were no windows near the holding cell, no streaks of light to say that it was dawn. But he knew it was. "I've slept all night!" He was incredulous. "All night!"

"Like a baby," the guard remarked.

"Has my attorney been here?"

"Nope. The chaplain looked in a couple of times, but decided not to bother you. The warden's been down—that man never sleeps."

"I've got to see him."

Suddenly time was rushing by.

There was a telephone near the guard. Without comment he lifted it, spoke into the mouthpiece, then set it down, all without looking away from Carson. After five minutes of worriedly rubbing his hands together, the convict heard the sound of approaching footsteps. A metal door swung open. The warden and the chaplain walked to him.

"Decker," Carson asked without prologue. "Has he been here?"

The warden shook his head.

"But he—he was supposed to! He should have!"

The warden averted Carson's anxious stare.

"Ralph," the chaplain began, "sometimes, when there is nothing more they can do, attorneys don't like to—"

"Nothing more they can do?" The phrase burst from him. "There *is* something he can do! I told him! I told *you*, padre! You know there is. He's going to free me! He's going to save me!"

The picture of Little Sam waiting for an angel flashed through Carson's mind, and the old man wondered if he wore the same desperate expression that Sam had when his angel didn't come.

"Warden, I'll tell *you*." Carson grabbed him by both arms. The warden didn't resist. The guard watched apprehensively.

"I've already told him, Ralph," the chaplain said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then you know he's coming back! You know he'll prove I'm innocent!"

They talked for two hours. Carson ticked off the precious seconds. "Where is he?" he cried once, dangerously on the brink of something worse than panic.

Almost at that moment the guard motioned and the warden left the cell. They talked out of earshot, and in a few minutes the warden came back. "Mr. Decker called," he said. "He's on his way."

Carson sighed heavily and wiped his brow. "Did he say anything?"

"He said he'd be here—that's all."

"I thought he'd never . . ."

It was now 8:30.

An hour and a half to go.

The warden left. Carson and the chaplain talked, and the prisoner grew uneasy with the litany of the words.

An hour passed.

Thirty minutes left.

"He's here." The guard spoke casually as he set down the telephone. Carson knew immediately what he meant. A few minutes later the attorney walked in, unsmiling.

"Tell me!" Carson demanded. "Has the stay come through? When do I get out of here?"

He waited, oblivious to the chaplain, his gaze locked on the haggard lawyer. Decker's arms hung limply by his sides. He avoided Carson's intense gaze.

"There was nothing there," the attorney said finally. "No box. No ax."

"But there was! I put it there! I know there was! On the hillside—" Was it on the hillside or on the flat? "Under a tree off Mountain Road —" Or was it Foothill Road? Or near a fence?

Decker shook his head slowly. "No ax, Ralph. No Vic Herman."

Growing horror began to cloud Carson's mind, enveloping him in the emptiness that had been his nightmare.

And in the silence that followed, he could hear a metal door slide back and the faint click of footsteps from the opposite end of the corridor—footsteps that grew louder and louder.

They're coming for me!

The realization at last rushed through him. Suddenly, chillingly raw to his doom, Carson faced the final truths, each in a separate image in his mind. He saw his own arm swinging through the air and heard the blade biting deeply.

At the beginning he had created a plan—to stall for time; and in his desperation he had come to believe these things existed. But there never was a hidden ax; there never had been a Vic.

Carson too had been waiting frantically for an angel—his angel. And like Little Sam's, it had never come.

The cell door swung open and the warden stepped forward. "Come, Ralph," he said. "It's time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**RUFUS KING**
TITLE:	***Gift for the Bride***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Stuff Driscoll
LOCALE:	Halcyon, Florida
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Wealthy Mrs. Quillby really had a double problem. She resolved it in her usual forthright way—by killing two birds with one bullet . . . The second bullet was, of course, the "clincher."*

THE BRIDAL GIFT THAT MRS. JEANnet Quillby planned to bestow on her daughter Alice consisted, after much thought and moralistic juggling, in the getting rid of Oscar Hunt for good.

To accomplish this tastefully demanded something in the nature of a trap, which in turn posed the need for an attractive bait. For the trap's locale Mrs. Quillby had chosen her home in Halcyon, Florida, and for the bait a packet of $10,000. in tired bills.

"I must tell you, Jeannet,"—Oscar Hunt had said this to her on that shattering Thursday of last week when he had pounced on Mrs. Quillby out of the long-gone past—"that I don't see what I ever saw in you. You've changed. You've hardened. Like you were carved in stone."

This was, of course, absurd and yet the indictment did hold a measure of truth. Mrs. Quillby *had* become something not of a statue but of a metallic machine, whereas some twenty years before she had been a good deal as Oscar Hunt remembered her—gentle and soft—which happened to be much as her daughter Alice was today.

Similarly, on that ghastly Thursday of the previous week, Mrs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quillby had thought: but you also have changed, Oscar. Where, she had wondered, was the muscular young fullback with his overtones of the apache who had married her in her dream-drugged teens on that wintry night up in Cohoes, New York? Who had shortly been drafted into battle and had later been officially declared dead? Where? Well, he was obviously right before her in this plumping, middle-aged caricature, self-resurrected in the best Enoch Arden tradition to destroy not herself but her daughter Alice—the child who had been born to her and Wilfred two years after Oscar's presumed death.

"Why have you waited so long, Oscar?"

"I am a patient man, Jeannet. There is a perfect moment for everything." He added grandiloquently with a flash of the pseudo-intellectualism which, combined with biceps, had so impressed her youth, "A moment of destiny."

"If it was simply money, my marriage with Wilfred made me a rich woman years ago." It *was* money surely but, she decided hopelessly, money alone could never guarantee his silence. Even though he drained her to the last cent there would be no comfort.

Oscar said impatiently, "Of course it is money. But it is only since Quillby's death that you've had control over it, and it is only recently that I have the leverage to force you to give it up."

Mrs. Quillby realized that this was true. Only since she had been granted probate of the will several weeks ago had she been in personal control of the Quillby fortune. And the moment for Oscar's pounce was indeed ripe—her daughter's forthcoming marriage into the socially strait-laced and austere Benton family, to young Ernest Benton, heir apparent to Benton's Biscuits, an octopus-type bakery chain that graced the nation's better tea and cocktail tables with *bon bouches* trifles for any occasion.

Would the Bentons countenance an illegitimate daughter-in-law, albeit an unwitting one? Even granting that Mrs. Quillby, before she had married Wilfred, had been assured that Oscar's so-briefly-known body lay combat-killed in the blistering sands of Africa? Conceivably a more flexible family could accept the mixup. But the Bentons? Ernest?

Never. To that formalist family sin was sin.

Mrs. Quillby herself was not far behind the Bentons in all this. She was a deeply religious woman and there was small question in her dogmatic opinion but that in having married Wilfred without first having viewed Oscar's corpse, as it were, in person she had committed bigamy and Alice was a love child.

She would have liked to thrash the problem out with the Reverend Davis Monopole but he was absent from Halcyon on some churchly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

matters in Chicago; and with young Hubert Brisket—the Reverend Monopole's beefy and basketball-biased assistant—there was not the same bond. Hubert Brisket was not the sort of young curate, Mrs. Quillby felt, whom one could unreservedly lean against as a Symbol.

Truly, one word from Oscar to the Bentons, even one good look at him in his plumping flesh and sly, pouched air . . .

"Just what do you have in mind, Oscar?" she had asked.

"Nothing in the nature of a lump sum, Jeannet. I know myself, my little weaknesses. And you are too clever a woman to believe that I should remain satisfied, not keep coming back for more. My thoughts lie in small but steady doses. Perhaps on a yearly basis would be best for both of us. Say in the unpainful amount—unpainful for a woman of your wealth—of around ten thousand a year?"

"You would give me any proofs you have?"

"I've kept none of your letters, nothing like that. No, I have nothing on paper, Jeannet."

"I have our wedding license, Oscar. I shall, of course, burn it."

"Why bother?" Oscar then added, and in doing so signed his own death warrant, "Certified copies are a dime a dozen. I'd simply have to get in touch with the proper bureau of records up in Cohoes. No, Jeannet, you must take my terms on simple faith."

"All right." Her shrug was the counterpart of fatalism. "What else is there for me to do?"

What else, Mrs. Quillby decided after Oscar had gone, reduced itself to an appropriate method for Oscar's divorce from the world of the living. No other answer appeared conclusive. Whatever had happened to him through the intervening years—how he had busied himself, whether evilly or nobly, but surely evilly—did not interest her in the least. His *being* was all that mattered to her beloved Alice, whom she cared for with the protective instincts of a maternal puma.

Mrs. Quillby thanked heaven with all her heart that Alice *had* been Wilfred's conception and not Oscar's, even though as a result Alice now teetered on the brink of being a social outcast. Never, Mrs. Quillby vowed, should that come to pass; for Alice was an infinitely sensitive young woman, lovely in body, lovely in soul, and the stigma, no matter how controversial, would scar her beyond cure. It might even —she chose a gentler word—*unsettle* her.

So that had been Mrs. Quillby's hideous Thursday of last week and now, this following Monday, her scenario was arranged, her moralistic qualms were anesthetized, and Oscar was due to present himself at the Quillby home that evening at ten.

The Quillby house was in parti-Moorish style and set within an ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tensive plot of subtropical landscaped grounds on the seaward fringe of Halcyon—a domestic little township that lies comfortably unconscious between the explosive neons of Miami and the more rarefied beguilements of Fort Lauderdale.

The room Mrs. Quillby selected as suitable for Oscar's demise adjoined her own suite. A bank of jaousies on its terrace side gave it the effect of a loggia, and since Wilfred's death Mrs. Quillby had been using it as a combination sitting room and office where she could conduct household matters and business oddments connected with the extensive Quillby properties.

She had had Wilfred's impressive teakwood desk moved into it from the library, placing it near the jalousies at an angle where sunlight would shower across her shoulders. It neither bothered nor occurred to her that the desk upset the room's pale economy, what with its dark bulk ponderous on the deep pile of the carpeting which covered the floor and held the color of burnished brass.

After dinner of this fateful evening, after Alice had left the house with her fiancé Ernest Benton for an open air concert in Halcyon Park, after the butler and a serving maid had restored the dining room and retired to the servants' quarters, and when she was to all social purposes alone, Mrs. Quillby set the stage.

She had previously attended to burning the ill-fated marriage license. It had been like an interment, rather, and, feeling a delicacy about it, she had selected a silver cigarette box for the cremation. The task done, she had closed the lid on the curled, copper leaves of—*then*.

She put the packet of $10,000 in a top drawer of the teakwood desk. At some remove from the desk stood a chaise longue done in French gray corduroy and having two cushions that were covered with a rose silk. Beneath these cushions Mrs. Quillby hid an automatic pistol, a Colt Super .38, that she had inherited from Wilfred.

The automatic pistol presented no mysteries to Mrs. Quillby who was familiar with firearms and an expert shot. Wilfred had attended to that, since aside from his business interests in land development Wilfred's hobby had been criminology. He had even pampered his hobby to the extent of having had himself appointed an honorary lieutenant on the Halcyon police force (12 men). It was a cachet of no significance whatever, beyond generous contributions yearly to the police welfare fund.

From such lore which Wilfred had shared with her, Mrs. Quillby had selected the dictum that under particular circumstances a policeman would *first fire a warning shot before he would shoot to kill.*

Her final "prop" was a bone-handled clasp knife that Wilfred

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had carried when hunting or fishing. The corrugated handle would reject fingerprints. She opened the four-inch blade and placed the knife on the desk, concealing it under the folds of a cerise scarf.

Mrs. Quillby then chose her costume for the approaching exit of Oscar. She was a handsome woman in an important-looking fashion and, as Oscar had pointed out, her figure had marbled with the years rather than having gone to fat. She exchanged her dinner dress for a negligee of violet crepe, creamed off her evening make-up, thus leaving her face exposed, and set her crop of blue-gray hair in pins.

Finally she arranged herself on the chaise longue with a new mystery novel and looked at her watch. Its hands pointed at a quarter to ten.

The hour came, and Oscar's first remark as he stepped in through a terrace door was the cliché, slightly slurred, "Are we alone?"

Mrs. Quillby said quite, and once more she thought, on seeing him, on realizing that added to the crumbling done by time he was stone-drunk: how could I have ever!

Suddenly, realizing its implications, its danger to her ultimate gesture, she said, "Your hair is wet. Is it raining?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When what?"

She said fiercely between clenched and costly teeth, "When did the rain start?"

"Oh." Oscar thought about it. Somewhat fuzzily he had been looking forward to this rendezvous as a semisocial moment and Mrs. Quillby's gritted expression bewildered him. He said, "Why? Does it matter?"

"It matters because Alice and Ernest went to a park concert."

"Admirable." A reflective look tried to grope through a glaze of Jamaica rum. "So different from our youthful pursuits, Jeannet."

She did remember, and for a disturbing moment the hot dissolvement of that early love laid a faint backwash over her heart, weakening for the briefest instant the steel of her deadly intention. Then she dropped a deliberate curtain over the past and listening, now that the wet beads on Oscar's remaining hairs brought it to her notice, she clearly heard the pelt of raindrops on the terrace flagstones.

"The concert will be rained out," she said. "I had counted on their staying there. They will be home soon."

"Home? Why not go on to a night club?"

"It will take some time to get out of the park crush and Alice will be wet through. She'll want to come home to change."

The air of Mrs. Quillby's urgency, her rush of nerves that was almost electric in its force, lapped out over Oscar and he said, "Then let's get it over with. Where's the money?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's in the desk. In the left top drawer."

The feel of the pistol's metal chilled her hand and steadied her nerves. Her eyes held the veiled commiseration of a judge as they followed Oscar's avid advance on the desk, watched his opening of the drawer, and saw his all but indecent expression as he moved a step or two away from the desk with the money gripped in his hands.

"I won't count it now," he said. "I'll clear right out, and count it later."

"As you wish." Involuntarily Mrs. Quillby added in a tight, choked voice, "Goodbye, Oscar."

With the precision of an expert shot she fired the gun.

After an interval of perhaps thirty seconds, during which she moved swiftly and arranged certain carefully worked out details of her murder plan, she fired the gun a second time.

With Oscar completely dead on the floor at her feet, with that look of mortal comprehension in his fixed, sodden eyes, a rush of nostalgia swept across Mrs. Quillby, carrying with it a burden of the old appeal, the ache and rusted sediments of her first real love. A deadly nausea at the finality of what she had done caused her to faint.

The sound of the two spaced shots had carried on the night air—carried sharply above the tattoo of falling rain, out to the driveway where Alice and Ernest Benton had just parked.

"Shots?" Ernest said.

"Definitely shots," Alice said.

Shaken, they hurried into the house.

Dawn accomplished its quick and businesslike tropical advance before Stuff Driscoll, chief criminal investigator for the sheriff's bureau, left the Quillby house and transferred his activities to headquarters.

Throughout the dark hours Stuff had been engaged in various investigations with the local boys, the medical examiner, and the mobile crime lab. He had telephoned his home in Fort Lauderdale and had told his wife Vi that he might not be back until when. Vi had asked him what was up and he had replied, "A liar and a lie." Be cryptic, she had said, but he had left it at that.

Had Mrs. Quillby been aware of Stuff's activities the knowledge would, as the saying goes, have given her pause. Happily she was not. She had been brought out of her faint by Alice with sniffs from a bottle of household ammonia. She had barely given her daughter and Ernest Benton an outline of her methodically rehearsed version of the "attack" when, having been phoned for by Ernest, their family doctor arrived. He had considered Mrs. Quillby to be still on the skirts of hysteria from shock and had placed her under strong sedation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was nearly nine in the morning before Mrs. Quillby woke up. The effects of her drugged sleep were slow to dissipate and several moments passed before remembrance trickled back. When the picture was clear she examined it in search of some detail, of the *ever fatal little slip* that Wilfred, in his meticulous review to her of famous murders, had pointed out as having caused the downfall of so many killers.

She could find none.

Every move she had made now became clear in retrospect. She had drawn the pistol from beneath the rose silk pillows at the precise moment when Oscar, the packet of bills in his hands, had moved from behind the desk and taken a step or two toward her.

He was at a distance of about ten feet when she had fired.

The bullet had struck him directly between the eyes and he had fallen like a rock onto the brass-toned pile of the carpeting.

Mrs. Quillby then had moved swiftly to the desk.

She had knocked a heavy metal reading lamp over on its side.

She had removed the open clasp knife from under the cerise scarf and had placed it beneath Oscar's dead right hand.

She had shoved the packet of bills into his coat pocket.

She had searched him for papers of identification and had found none. Cohoes, to her shaken satisfaction, was safely buried under the debris of twenty forgotten years and in the curled sepia fragments of the burned marriage license.

She then had fired the gun a second time—this time into the ceiling. A second bullet was necessary—to confirm her story of a "warning shot."

Lastly, after that nauseating look into the death mask of Oscar's incredulous expression, she had faltered backward—in the direction of the chaise longue, and had, before she quite reached it, collapsed.

No—there was no fatal little slip.

Not even a glimmer of one.

Good.

An hour after this morale-boosting recall of the night, clothed in battleship-gray shantung, Mrs. Quillby received Stuff Driscoll in the library. A Sergeant Dick of the local force was present to take down her statement in shorthand and then to transcribe it for her signature.

"So kind of you to take it down here at home, Mr. Driscoll."

Seated rather formally in a side chair, Mrs. Quillby attempted to appraise Stuff. The newer school of police officer, she thought. College-trained, physically rather superb and personable in what the French would call a *plein air* way, casually well dressed in one of those esoteric materials produced from crushed petroleum or something, and probably in his early thirties with Korea behind him.

Intelligent—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Too intelligent?

A first slight feeling of unease brushed Mrs. Quillby's mind.

"I am wondering," she said, "why you have personally bothered, Mr. Driscoll. Naturally I've read about you." Her smile bordered on the flattering as she added, "But always in connection with important cases. The more difficult ones."

"It was a matter of chance."

Stuff had the art of lying with an ingenuous sort of conviction. He held a brief admiration for the acuteness of Mrs. Quillby's direct assault, at her putting her finger on the questionable fact of his being there. As the sheriff's chief investigator, his activities were not involved with the inconsequential which, on its surface, was what the present instance amounted to—a householder defending her life and property against an armed intruder, an open-and-shut case of justifiable homicide. Or, he amended mentally, it could turn out to have been a brilliant, barefaced cover-up for premeditated murder.

"Chance, Mr. Driscoll?"

"I was looking into some matters at local headquarters when the call came in, and the boys suggested that I come along for the ride." To an extent this was the truth. It was only after his examination of the scene and after the curious discrepancies had struck him in Alice Quillby's recital of her mother's version of the incident that Stuff had decided to take over.

He reflected briefly on his meeting with Alice and young Benton. Rarely had a girl impressed him so—well, so definitively. Good was all he could think about—just plain good, in all the honest meanings of the word. Young Benton had a strong flavor of it, too. Stuff had felt, he still felt, that the two youngsters were absurdly and happily right for each other.

"So I thought," he elaborated, "that I'd see it through."

"But surely it's perfectly simple?"

"To use an old bromide, Mrs. Quillby, it's a strictly a matter of routine, that's all. Your daughter's statement last night was secondhand and naturally sketchy. Sergeant Dick and I are here to take down your own account. If you're ready?"

Sergeant Dick, in his corner, prepared to jot.

"I'll begin with after dinner, Mr. Driscoll. Alice and Ernest Benton left for a park concert, then I read for a while in that terrace room—I call it my office."

"Were the terrace doors locked?"

"No. Selfridge, our butler, makes the rounds after Alice and I have retired. He then locks the doors, turns out the lights—the usual things. That man could have been standing out in the dark watching me reading, waiting for me to leave the room and go to bed. That seems to be the pattern of the recent wave of burglaries in Halcyon."

Stuff knew her to be right about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this. "Yes, petty pilferings. Vagrants. Mostly because of hunger, poor devils. When did you leave the room?"

"About nine thirty, I would say. I felt exceptionally tired after what had been a strenuous day—a business deal, two club meetings—you know. I went to my bedroom—it connects with the terrace room—and got ready for the night."

"What was it that alarmed you?"

"A noise in the terrace room. Rather sharp, like metal striking wood."

"That would have been the desk lamp. We found it on its side and figured that the man had knocked it over. The alcohol content in his blood showed he was drunk."

Mrs. Quillby's unease returned. Her eyes were thoughtful. The extent of the investigation grew more apparent to her. "Surely," she said, "there hasn't been an autopsy? I mean, my shot, the cause of death couldn't be more obvious."

"An autopsy is almost a requisite, Mrs. Quillby, in most cases of death by violence. Now, you heard this noise of the lamp falling, and then?"

"I can only refer to the local burglaries that have been so prevalent. I believe three were reported last week. That is why I took the gun when I went to investigate."

"You didn't consider calling the servants?"

"I felt no sense of real danger. I am a capable woman, Mr. Driscoll."

"The gun was an automatic pistol, a Colt Super .38. You were familiar with its mechanism? Its safety catch?"

"Completely so. My husband, you may remember, was an amateur criminologist and an expert shot. I joined him in his interests. Shall I go on?"

"Please," he said, and thought passingly on the truth of a quotation from the late Mr. Alexander Pope: *A little learning is a dangerous thing.*

"I opened the connecting door cautiously. I saw the man standing behind the desk. He was rifling the drawers."

"Was he unaware of the door being opened?"

"Completely. He was too—well, I should describe it as excited, sort of feverishly gripped by having found the packet of bills."

"While we're on it, wasn't that a pretty large sum of cash to keep in the house? Ten thousand dollars?"

Mrs. Quillby, who in so many ways was an extremely smart woman, had foreseen the probability of just such a question and had prepared for it—even to the extent of having planted her fictitious reasons with the teller when she had withdrawn the money at the bank.

"It was a large sum, Mr. Quillby," she admitted frankly, "but it wasn't unusual. I have taken over my husband's business affairs and real estate developments, and there are times when a cash transaction, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enticement of the actual money in hand, can close a deal."

"And there is such a transaction in prospect?"

"One that I have been contemplating, yes. Out in the county somewhat west of Ojus. The small parcel I'm considering would be the key to a proposed larger development."

"I see." It was conceivable. Very smooth. And clever. "Perhaps the man saw you withdraw the money at the bank." Stuff deliberately handed this to her on a silver platter. "He may have followed you home, then waited for nightfall. For a good opportunity."

Was it too pat? Too *kind?* Mrs. Quillby's unease increased. "That never occurred to me," she said, "but it's quite logical. I don't recall noticing him. At the bank, I mean."

"There's no reason why you should have. Shall we go on? You were standing in the doorway and he was behind the desk."

"Well, I took a step or two into the room."

This was important, and Stuff held his voice and manner to a point of casual diffidence. "Just how many, Mrs. Quillby?"

"Steps?"

"Yes."

"Well, really—"

"I tell you what, if you don't mind—we might go to the terrace room and you could show me."

"Of course I don't mind. But why all this exactitude, Mr. Driscoll?"

"Only to clarify the general picture. It will simplify things at the inquest."

They reached the terrace room, now brilliant with a smash of sunlight through its bank of jalousies, and the first thing that caught Mrs. Quillby's attention were several outlines drawn in chalk, very white on the carpet's pile of burnished brass. She recognized Oscar. How true to form the scene was, she thought, to the murder cases that Wilfred had discussed with her!

"They will have been photographed by now?" she asked.

Stuff caught the allusion from the direction of her look and said, "Yes, that has all been done. Your maid will have no trouble in removing the chalk marks—an ordinary brushing will suffice. Now would you please show me just where you were standing when you fired?"

Mrs. Quillby looked thoughtfully at the doorway to her suite, then selected a position that placed her four or five steps inside the room.

"About here, I should say."

"Just hold it, please." Stuff moved over to behind the desk. "Think of me as that man. I am now rifling the drawers," he said.

"You find the money in the upper left hand one."

"And then?"

"Then I said, I think: Put it back. I suppose that sounds silly, but it was my first reaction."

"A natural one. I'm startled, of course?"

"Very. It was almost a spasm of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fright. Then you whip out the knife and open its blade."

"The money, Mrs. Quillby? If both my hands are occupied with opening the clasp knife?"

"Money?" Her smile was barely perceptible as she said easily, "Oh, that. Of course, you've already jammed it into a coat pocket. Wasn't it found there?"

"That's right. Did he rush at you?"

"No, he moved rather slowly. Catlike. He just came around the desk and towards me."

"Like this?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"I held my stand. I said: Take another step and I'll shoot."

"That stopped him?"

"Momentarily. If you'll forgive the vulgarity, he snarled at me, saying no woman has the guts. I assured him that I did have, and fired a shot into the air."

"Your first shot?"

"My first, my *warning* shot. My husband was a stickler about police procedure and he rather, well, dinned it into me. Anyhow, whether because of drunkenness, or because he thought I had been aiming at him and couldn't hit a barn door, I don't know, but the man lunged at me with the knife and I was compelled to fire point-blank at him."

"Had he almost reached you?"

"So close—this may seem farfetched, but I imagined I could feel his breath."

"And you were standing where you are now?"

"Yes." A stab of apprehension pierced Mrs. Quillby as she realized that the chalk outline of the body where Oscar had fallen was over by the desk, a good ten feet away. She controlled her expression perfectly, however, and added smoothly, "Of course the shock of the bullet caused him to stagger backwards before he fell."

"I see." Stuff's smile was the epitome of kindly understanding. "Well, thank you, Mrs. Quillby. You have been very patient."

"This is all?"

"Yes. If we may return to the library? If Sergeant Dick may use the typewriter I saw there he can transcribe the statement, you can sign it, and that will wrap the morning up."

While Sergeant Dick typed, while Mrs. Quillby sat in patience, Stuff casually examined the library's book shelves, one section of which was devoted to works on criminology.

"I see that your husband took the subject quite seriously," he said. "This is a good collection."

"You must be familiar with them, naturally?"

"With most of them, yes."

Stuff noted a copy of *Homicide Investigation,* by LeMoyne Snyder, and an odd impulse gripped him in a way that at the moment he found difficult to analyze. His training in psychology, abnormal and otherwise, had been more or less run-of-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the-mill but it was basic enough to have imbued him with a sound respect for the subconscious mind, for that still not adequately explored area of compulsive action and reaction. Occasionally, he smiled slightly, labeled "hunches."

His hand hesitated in indecision, then he took the book from the shelf. He was familiar with its contents and easily found what he was looking for—on page 96. Its subject matter was concerned with firearms evidence. He placed the book face upward on a coffee table, opened at pages 96-97. Would it work as a catalyst? Perhaps. Not in the Greek sense of dissolution, but as an accelerant to reaction. He then turned to Mrs. Quillby and accepted the typed statement she had just read and signed.

He had started to leave the library with Sergeant Dick when Mrs. Quillby stopped him by asking, "Tell me, Mr. Driscoll—that man—have you been able to establish his identity?"

Was this simple curiosity? Stuff wondered. He detected a tightening of muscles at the corner of her eyes, a hint of strain in her lips.

"To a degree," he said.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that he carried no papers, no driver's license or social security card, but the job was simplified by his having been listed in the Hood Book. I recalled having seen a mug shot of him in it."

"The what book?"

"It's the underworld's social register for the Dade-Broward-Palm Beach police network."

"Isn't that something new?"

"No, not new, just not publicized very much. The Hood Book is strictly for police information only. Sort of a Who's Who in Crime. It lists the moves, contacts, every blind—that is, every legitimate business place used as a front—of South Florida racketeers, hoodlums, and thieves. It even includes their clean, that is, their non criminal acquaintances. The Tri-County Intelligence Unit compiles it."

"And that man last night"—so Oscar's hidden, lost years *had* been evil ones!—"you say he is listed in it? That he was a local man?"

Stuff considered his answer carefully. He was fishing in roiled waters, with tackle of the most nebulous nature, against a woman of wealth and influence, whose assured façade presented a shantung-cased enigma. He could not make up his mind about her—especially about her motivation. What was it? Was she simply a fanatic? Not in the sense of madness, but in the old sense—the fanaticism of martyrs and saints? The notion did not amuse him.

What could drive a woman of her apparent nature, a mother of such a sterling girl as Alice Quillby, to commit murder? Stuff found no reason—yet incontrovertible facts indicated that murder had been done.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was not stupid—far from it. The motive of blackmail seemed the most probable answer. Some disreputable lapse in Mrs. Quillby's past that had come to the man's knowledge, and the proof of it into his possession. No, it wasn't that simple. Mrs. Quillby would certainly have paid money to buy the man's silence. But calculated murder?

No—the motive must have been stronger, must have been fanatically (again that word) compelling to drive Mrs. Quillby to kill. On the periphery of his thoughts a question brushed lightly by: for the sake of someone else?

Mrs. Quillby broke the long and provocative pause. She repeated her question, "I asked you whether he was a local man, Mr. Driscoll."

He said, "He had been in this part of Florida for the past year or two, so far as his record shows."

"A thief?" She imagined that was what Oscar would have been, and a twinge nipped her heartstrings as she remembered Mr. Driscoll's strangely kind remarks about the vagrants who committed petty thefts "mostly because of hunger, poor devils."

"Not theft in the sense of larceny, Mrs. Quillby."

"What other sense is there?"

"One's good name, one's beliefs—let's just say the man is well dead. I think a deserved death. Put it this way. We had nothing on him but suspicion, nothing for which he could have been legally indicted."

"What was he suspected of?"

"As possibly having been connected with the sadistic death of a woman tourist last year. A Mrs. Harrington. Not proven. He wasn't brought before the Grand Jury."

A wave of relief swept through her. "Johnson—that was his name?"

"Oscar Johnson. He had several aliases, but he always clung to the first name of Oscar."

Unease swept back again. "You must have looked up his past very completely?"

"No, not extensively. The usual channels. If the county prosecutor had decided to bring the case to court, of course, we'd have dug back to his birth."

"So you left it at that?"

"As I said, Mrs. Quillby, he was one of the clever ones."

Alone in the library after the departure of Mr. Driscoll and Sergeant Dick, Mrs. Quillby sank gratefully on the lounge and took a cigarette from a box on the coffee table. She wanted a moment's rest from the ordeal of the past hour, before plunging into the morning's backlog of messages from friends, from the Bentons, from reporters determined on interviews—all of whom Alice, with Ernest's help, had succeeded in holding at bay.

At first idly, her eyes rested on the opened book on homicide investigation by Snyder—idly because she was mentally concentrating on the interview just ended.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her first sensation was one of relief, almost a blessing, that Oscar had deserved to have been killed for a more cold-blooded reason than for his menace to her child. It was evident Mr. Driscoll believed that Oscar, through some wicked cleverness, had escaped a just punishment for the death of that Mrs. Harrington, and to a good degree this palliated the all but unbearable burden that kept wrenching at her conscience.

From this soothing sophistry Mrs. Quillby's thoughts took a shocking turn as certain questions popped up to shatter her with their alarming implications.

Mrs. Harrington's unsolved death with Oscar suspected—how deeply *had* the delving been done by the police into Oscar's past? Mr. Driscoll had been very vague on the point. Purposely vague?

What routes of inquiry would the investigation of Oscar's fingerprints have taken? The "Hood Book," apparently, but that seemed relatively unimportant because it was local. The F.B.I.—the War Department—Cohoes—

Rubbish. The war and Cohoes were two decades back, moldered by now in the archives of oblivion. Mrs. Quillby compelled herself to believe this and tried sharply to steady her nerves.

There would be danger only if she were under suspicion, only if her version of last night's "attack" were to prove vulnerable. And her disposal of Oscar had been foolproof: an armed intruder, a warning shot, then a conclusive shot fired in the most palpable and convincing act of self-defense.

The very daring, the open-faced quality of her plan had carried victory. As Wilfred had so often, so didactically pointed out, it was the devious murder that nine times out of ten led to downfall. The complicated plot. The "perfect alibi" that thanks to some unsuspected chance witness (the old lady in the window with a toothache) finally collapsed. Her plot was simplicity itself.

Mrs. Quillby's eyes returned to the opened book.

She found nothing unusual and certainly nothing alarming in Mr. Driscoll's having been interested in Wilfred's collection of books on criminology, nor in Mr. Driscoll's having picked out and looked through this work in particular.

But . . .

It was, Wilfred had told her, a standard work, a textbook in police and detective instruction really, and surely one that a man of Mr. Driscoll's training would be completely familiar with. Why, then, his particular interest in it now? Why, if done with a purpose, had he pointedly left it lying open here where there was every reason to believe that she would notice it?—if only to return it to its place on the shelves. Inconsequential chance? Not Mrs. Quillby decided with that young man!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She took a sharper look at the two pages left exposed by Mr. Driscoll. As she did so, as their implication sank in, a quite terrifying idea occurred to Mrs. Quillby while an icy ripple crept through her veins. She stood up and taking the book with her, holding it still open with fingers that shook beneath this birth of fear, she returned to the terrace room and to its chalk marks, still white against the carpet's burnished brass pile.

After intensive study of the marks, of the book pages, she exclaimed softly, "Fool! Oh, Wilfred, how right you were! The *fatal little slip*—"

With the blinding clarity of a magnesium flare Mrs. Quillby recognized and accepted the appalling fact that Mr. Driscoll *knew*. She would be an idiot, she told herself, to believe otherwise.

How far back into the past would his probing have reached? Not too far, she thought, up to now.

But from now on?

Now that the spotlight was focused not only on Oscar but equally on herself, young Mr. Driscoll would really dig. And to salvage the security of her daughter's future existence, Mrs. Quillby realized that Mr. Driscoll must be stopped from further digging.

But how?

How bring the case, for Alice's sake, to a definitive stop? For it must be stopped, officially called closed, at this relatively harmless point in its development. During this hour when friends and the press were in a congratulatory mood over her bravery and when she reigned as a heroine of sorts in the Benton eyes, her child's wedding plans were still secure.

Her heart was a leaden ball as her determination stiffened—that Mr. Driscoll must be checked from further delvings *at any cost.*

It was then, after a series of dark thought waves had clouded her normal clear thinking, and in the admittedly harassed and off-beat fantasia of her brain, that Mrs. Quillby reflected on another of Wilfred's often repeated dicta: the first killing is the hardest; the next one comes easier.

It was after the lunch hour when Stuff got home. His house was an agreeable ranch-type structure set on the southern bank of one of Fort Lauderdale's placid canals. A breathing space, shady with olive oaks and palm trees, separated it on either flank from its neighbors, while in the rear, stretching down to the canal's edge, his wife Vi had created a garden effect that included among the sweet perfumes of jasmine and mimosa a utilitarian bed of kitchen herbs, some tomato plants, and (for kicks) some corn.

As usual, Stuff felt delight at the sight of her, cool in lilac linen. One of his deeper peeves was the apparently indiscriminate aversion of South Florida matrons to skirts,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and there were moments when he was fed up with a county-wide view of zippered buttocks and meaty thighs.

"You look good," he said, giving her a somewhat more strenuous version of his homecoming kiss.

"Well, thank you, sir!" Vi observed him critically. "You yourself don't look so hot, dear. A bit on the Brand X side. Was it a tough night?"

"Not tough so much as puzzling."

"The *Sun* made quite a splash of it. They've practically, voted Mrs. Quillby the Heroine of the Year. That, and the Annie Oakley of the Gold Coast. What's wrong about it?"

"Plenty, Vi. After I shower I'll go into it with you."

Stuff often thought it was this sharing of interest that had gone a long way toward making their marriage a comfortable one. He valued not only Vi's discretion in never discussing his confidences with her friends, but mostly he valued her analytical mind—a mind that had been excellently trained at Barry College down in Miami Shores.

He took a copy of Mrs. Quillby's statement from his brief case and handed it to her. "Read this, will you, while I'm changing."

Some twenty minutes later, comfortable in shorts and sandals, Stuff joined Vi in the garden and gratefully accepted a chilled glass of Planter's Punch. They settled in cypress-wood lawn chairs under the fernlike umbrella of a poinciana tree.

"It's like this," he said. "I know she lied—I *know* it. I believe she killed Oscar Johnson deliberately and *not* in self-defense. But Jerry won't touch the case." Jerry Attbury was the conservatively mustached, hazel-eyed, pipe-smoking, county prosecutor. "Not as the case stands now, and I can't say that I blame him. You've read the statement. What do you think?

"Well, aside from being sure that you've got a trick rabbit to pull out of your hat, I'd say that any jury would acquit Mrs. Quillby without leaving the box. She practically stood on her head to be *proper* about it. I mean, after all—that warning shot touch. The jury would eat it up. Then her holding her ground until she could feel his breath before she popped him. Honestly, Stuff, I can see them leaping to their feet and carting her off to an acquittal on their shoulders."

"Jerry's viewpoint entirely."

"And apart from everything else, what on earth would have been her motive? For murder, I mean, instead of the most obvious case of self-defense."

"I don't know her motive."

"Then why," Vi asked reasonably, "the fuss?"

"Because she lied."

"I can't see where or how. Her statement is reasonable enough."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There are points you don't know —they're the reason I'm certain her story is cockeyed."

"Well?"

"Come into the house," Stuff said.

They went into the living room where, from a book shelf, he took his own copy of LeMoyne Snyder's *Homicide Investigation* and opened it at pages 96-97.

"Look at these diagrams, Vi, and remember that the gun Mrs. Quillby used was an automatic Colt Super .38."

The diagrams, Vi saw, were concerned with the location of ejected shells when fire in some ordinary types of automatic guns. The third example from the left at the top of page 96 dealt with the automatic Colt Super .38.

She said, "I imagine what you're getting at is that the ejected shells weren't where they ought to have been? According to this diagram, if I stand like this and aim straight to the front, the shell will be ejected at an angle of one hundred twenty-eight degrees from the line of fire and will fall to my right rear. It should land about seven feet away in an oval area of about two and a half by one and a half feet in size. Right?"

"Right."

"Well, where *did* the shells fall?"

"I'll show you. Suppose this is roughly the terrace room. Here's the door to Mrs. Quillby's bedroom. She comes in, taking four or five steps, and stands here. There was a chaise longue just to the left. Now that lamp over there is about where the desk would be. Stand by it, Vi."

Vi did so.

"According to her statement," Stuff said, "I fire a warning shot up into the air. Where does the ejected shell go?"

"About seven feet to your right rear."

"No, it doesn't. Remember the line of fire."

"That's right. You were pointing the gun *up* towards the ceiling. The shell should have dropped somewhere to your right—maybe front right?"

"It didn't. The shell was lying where it should have been if she aimed straight ahead. In other words, directly at you, to kill you. Which the bullet did."

"Then that must have been the shell from her second shot, the one she aimed point-blank."

"There was no second shell—not where I'm standing."

"Where was it, then?"

"Over by where you are now—where the body lay."

"It's too mixed up for me—I don't get it."

"Think of her own words. Quote: 'I held my stand.' She claims to have stood in the same position *for both shots*. From the positions of the ejected shells, that is impossible."

"Couldn't she, or somebody, have kicked one of the shells accidentally, and it rolled over here?"

"That's scarcely probable, Vi. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carpet's got a deep pile and a kicked shell wouldn't roll far, if at all, and certainly not all the way over to where you're standing."

"If she was so familiar with guns," Vi said thoughtfully, "as she claims to be, why wouldn't she herself have noted the wrong position of the ejected shells?"

"Two reasons, I think: the state of her nerves—she was shaken up enough to have fainted—and secondly, the color of the carpet. It's the same shade as the shells, brass. I had to *look* for them before I spotted them and chalk-marked their positions. After I did locate them I just worked the diagrams of ejection in reverse and determined the two places from where she had really fired the shots."

"So that was what made you suspicious of her story."

"Yes, and the fact that she must have fired the much-advertised warning shot *after* she had killed him."

"How can you be sure of that? I mean, just the ejection pattern of the shells alone—"

"More than that. The medical examiner examined Oscar Johnson's forehead carefully. There were no powder grains around the bullet hole or anywhere on the skin of his forehead or face. Yet Mrs. Quillby claimed she fired point-blank as he leaped at her—so close that she could 'feel his breath'."

"Of course—there would have been powder burns."

"What's more, the shot would have dropped him cold—here at her feet by the chaise longue; but she states that he staggered backwards and collapsed by the desk. She realized, however, that the chalk outline of the body was a good ten feet or more from where she was standing while she handed me her cooked-up version, and had to cover up. She's a clever woman, Vi, all hard on the surface. But inside, well—"

"Like chocolates with soft centers."

"Just, and for some fool reason I feel a sort of sympathy for her."

"Stuff, why doesn't all this make Jerry feel that he has a case?"

"Well, he claims that even a half-baked defense counsel could and would twist the ejected-shell and powder-pattern evidence into nonsense for the jury. Defense would harp on Mrs. Quillby's state of shock—their doctor would testify to the genuineness of that—and convince them she had been too upset to remember clearly either just where she stood or how close Oscar Johnson was when she fired at him."

"She wasn't upset enough to remember that warning shot rigamarole."

"True, dear heart, true. The blistering fact is that *I'm* sure about what happened, and Jerry's sure, and still he's absolutely right in laying off until some connecting link is established between Oscar

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Johnson and Mrs. Quillby. A good, strong motive would do it. Otherwise, from a trial angle, the state's case would go up in smoke."

"But you're not going to drop it, are you?"

"Certainly not, even though I have the impression Jerry would be more than willing to let it ride. Without a motive, nothing short of a confession would convict her.

"Is she the type to break down?"

"Not under interrogation, I'd say. But from within herself—perhaps."

"Conscience? Fear?"

"It would take something to shatter her psychologically, where she'd lose her cocksure attitude that she'd gotten away with murder. I've laid a slight gob of bait in that direction."

"Skipping the elegance in phraseology, just what?"

"I put a copy of Snyder on a coffee table in the library. She's sure to spot it. I left it lying open at page 96. I know she was interested in the chalk marks, and I'm damn certain she's clever enough to connect them with the diagrams."

"But Stuff, darling, it's practically telling her that you're on to her."

"So it is, but without compromising myself officially—and without the risk of making a false accusation."

"What do you expect to gain by it? Surely not a confession? Flight?"

"No, nothing so drastic. But maybe it will jounce her out of her smugness. Her nerves will begin to crack. Tension will build up to a point where perhaps she'll do something foolish. Amateur murders usually do. Fear comes, then hopelessness, and they get irrational and attempt to cover up. It's a frame of mind, or lapse of mind, and that's when you turn the screw. In the meanwhile I'm going to dig up Oscar Johnson's past back to the cradle."

The telephone rang.

Stuff lifted the instrument. Jerry's voice came to him over the wire. As he listened, as his own responses came in monosyllables, Stuff's expression coated over, like under glass.

He hung up and said to Vi, "Got to chuck on pants and go out again. Jerry tells me the case has dropped right down the drain."

"Why, Stuff?"

"Mrs. Quillby is dead."

It was a mile or so west of Halcyon on the Stripling Road, where coquina gateposts to a ranch announced that some people named the Billmonts Lived There, that the crash had occurred.

Mrs. Quillby's car, one of the small foreign sports models, had rammed head-on into the eastern gatepost. The impact had crushed the front end with a savagery that had made a shambles of the windshield, the steering wheel—and Mrs. Quillby.

They had finished extricating the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body and were placing it in an ambulance when Stuff arrived.

A trooper from a road patrol car kept the traffic moving. A sheriff's deputy took photographs. Two others measured distances with a tape and made diagrammatic notes.

"I figured you'd want in," Jerry Attbury said.

"Accident?" Stuff asked. "Or meant?"

"Who knows? We don't. The tire marks are indistinct and traffic on this road isn't heavy. There were no witnesses to the actual crash."

"How do you figure it, Jerry?"

"I wouldn't know. The autopsy may show something. She was under drugs last night and there may have been some after effects. A heart condition might be possible, or a temporary blackout. And maybe, Stuff—knowing what we know—" Jerry left it hanging in air. Then he said, "I wouldn't know. I'm going to talk with the boys. Seems as if 'straight accident' will be the best report."

Stuff went over to Mrs. Quillby's car. The impact had, among the general wreckage, sprung its doors open, including the small cover of the glove compartment. A sheen of silver caught his eye. He reached into the compartment and drew it out—a silver cigarette box.

The interest of the other men was centered on the flick-flash of news photographers.

Stuff, in his momentary isolation, looked thoughtfully at the box. A curious thing to keep in the glove compartment of a car. It was plain silver and not initialed. An intended gift? But there was no wrapping. Perhaps Mrs. Quillby had been taking it to be initialed? No, that wasn't it—the place of purchase attended to that when a gift was ordered. Then what?

He opened the lid.

Burned paper. Flecks, flakes, curled and flat, and in shades of sepia-bronze.

A suggestion of print, barely decipherable. Parts of what looked like written names, also barely decipherable. The technicians at the crime lab would tell.

. . . *eannet* on one flake . . . *Osca* on one . .

Gently with a pencil he lifted flakes. Nothing—nothing—then—*rriage*.

No need to lift further. He returned the pencil to his pocket.

Jeannet . . . Oscar . . . a marriage license.

Bigamy? Illegitimacy? The basis for blackmail? He answered yes to all three.

The thought returned that earlier had brushed across the periphery of his mind: for the sake of someone else?

Alice, of course.

It fell, now, into place. All of it. And the silver box? Put in the car to have been thrown away where it would never be found? Then the intention sidetracked, smothered in the final moments when she nerved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finally her hands to twist the wheel?

Curious, Stuff felt, that he should have thought of the box as a gift. Well, wasn't it? Mrs. Quillby's gift to Alice: a murdering of the past, then her own life offered up in punishment for the deed. Her debt to society and to the State paid in full.

And all of it futile. If these charred, brown leaves . . . if laboratory tested, then the sacrificial gesture Mrs. Quillby had made would be rendered useless, and the future of those two youngsters would certainly be shot to hell.

Stuff's finger moved. He was still alone. There was no one to observe him—no one but Mrs. Quillby whose body was now being driven away. His finger gently pressed the damning leaves to powdered ash. He emptied the contents onto the ground. He closed the lid and replaced the box in the glove compartment of the car.

He said softly, as Dumas once had said, "Let pass the judgment of God."

CURRENT MYSTERY & SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Anderson, Paul	MURDER BOUND	Macmillan	$3.50	April 2
Atiyah, Edward	THE CRUEL FIRE	Doubleday	3.50	April 20
Audemars, Pierre	THE TURNS OF TIME	Harper	3.50	April 25
Black, Gavin	DEAD MAN CALLING	Random House	3.50	April 20
Brown, Fredric	THE FIVE-DAY NIGHTMARE	Dutton	2.95	April 16
Crispin, Edmund	BEWARE OF THE TRAINS	Walker & Company	3.50	April 6
Fair, A. A.	TRY ANYTHING ONCE	Morrow	2.95	April 18
FitzGerald, Nigel	BLACK WELCOME	Macmillan	3.50	April 2
Fleming, Ian	THE SPY WHO LOVED ME	Viking Press	3.95	April 16
Ford, Leslie	TRIAL BY AMBUSH	Scribner's Sons	2.95	April 2
Gardiner, Dorothy & Walker, Kathrine Sorley	RAYMOND CHANDLER SPEAKING	Houghton Mifflin	4.00	April
Harter, Walter	THE NICE YOUNG MAN	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	3.50	April 20
Harvester, Simon	THE COPPER BUTTERFLY	Walker & Company	3.50	April 20
Krasney, Samuel A.	HOMICIDE CALL	Morrow	3.50	April 11
Lockridge Richard & Frances	FIRST COME, FIRST KILL	Lippincott	2.95	April
Marsh, Ngaio	ANOTHER THREE-ACT SPECIAL	Little, Brown	4.95	April 10
McBain, Ed	THE EMPTY HOURS	Simon & Schuster	3.50	April 13
Morton, Anthony	IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HESTER	Doubleday	2.95	April 6
O'Malley, Patrick	THE AFFAIR OF SWAN LAKE	Mill	2.95	April 25
Ransome, Stephen	WITHOUT A TRACE	Doubleday	2.95	April 6
Stout, Rex	HOMICIDE TRINITY: A Nero Wolfe Threesome	Viking Press	2.95	April 26

Available wherever books are sold. Do not order through this magazine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

USE THIS ORDER FORM

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

505 PARK AVENUE / NEW YORK 22, N.Y.

Yes...Enter my subscription to

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

60 BIG ISSUES $15

☐ Bill Me ☐ Payment Enclosed

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____ E562

☐ Extend my present subscription

OR IF YOU PREFER
12 ISSUES FOR $4

☐ Bill Me

☐ Payment Enclosed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Victor Canning
Mark Van Doren
Anthony Boucher
Gordon Gaskill
Hugh Pentecost
Rufus King
Erle Stanley Gardner
Rex Stout
. . . and more

60 BIG ISSUES — $15

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT NO. 1050
NEW YORK, N. Y.

business
reply
mail

no postage stamp necessary if mailed in the United States

postage will be paid by

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

505 PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED